

**A Prestigious Path to Grace:
Class, Modernity, and Female Religiosity in Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism**

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between class formation, women’s religious practices, and domesticity among the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav mercantile communities (*baniyās*) of Gujarat. It argues that in modern India, Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities inform *baniyā* class formation and respectability on the one hand, and constitute the domestic patronage of Puṣṭimārg on the other. Women’s social and religious practices thus come to be centrally implicated in the question of what it means to be a Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav in the modern world.

Using archival and textual sources, I begin by unpacking the social and economic histories of *baniyā* communities in both pre-colonial and colonial contexts, and trace their emergence as Puṣṭimārg’s most prestigious patrons. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in emulation of Rajasthani nobility, *baniyās* publically displayed wealth and prestige through donative activities centered around both Puṣṭimārg temple ritual (*sevā*, “service”), and gifts offered to the Brahmin religious leaders of the tradition, the Gosvāmīs. As “class” begins to emerge as a discrete marker of status in colonial India, upper-caste Puṣṭimārg women are positioned as vital actors in the production of family prestige and respectability within the domestic sphere. In this dissertation, I therefore focus on Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* negotiations with modernity and identify *baniyā* men’s concerns around sectarian identity as they come to be dramatized in nineteenth and early twentieth-century social reform movements centered upon women in the Bombay Presidency (including the well-known “Mahārāj Libel Case” of 1862).

This study also turns to traditional sources, such as Puṣṭimārg hagiographic literature (*vārtās*) and devotional songs composed by women in the *dhol* and *garbā* genres, in order to understand the religious practices of women in these communities and their relationship to the production of prestige. My analysis of the *vārtās* provides a sense of women’s social roles and positions in the Puṣṭimārg imagination, while women’s performance genres provide an important counterpoint to the much-celebrated “official” liturgical music of Puṣṭimārg temples (*havelīs*). In the final chapter of the dissertation I draw on my ethnographic work to demonstrate how, in the contemporary context, the imbrication of material and religious cultures is seen through the performance of increasingly commodified styles of domestic ritual and through the consumption and display of religious commodities in the home. Recently, women from upper-class Puṣṭimārg families have also begun taking lessons in what they regard as the “classical” style of temple or *havelī* music. All these processes, I argue, cast women as the producers, performers, and pedagogues of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities. The material expressions of their devotion in domestic contexts as well as women’s religious practices – which includes performing *sevā* daily, organizing religious gatherings in the home, and participating in temple music lessons – have reconstituted the home as a modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

Résumé

Cette thèse analyse la relation entre constitution d'une classe, pratiques religieuses des femmes et espace privé, au sein de la communauté marchande Viṣṇouiste Puṣṭimārg du Gujarat. Il s'agit de montrer, d'une part, que, dans l'Inde moderne, les activités religieuses accomplies par les femmes Puṣṭimārg participent à la formation de la caste *baniyā* et à sa reconnaissance, et que, d'autre part, ces pratiques représentent un appui fondamental à la secte Puṣṭimārg dans l'espace domestique. Les pratiques sociales et religieuses des femmes constituent ainsi un élément central pour comprendre ce que signifie être Viṣṇouiste Puṣṭimārgī dans le monde actuel.

À partir d'archives et de sources écrites, je commence par mettre à jour l'histoire sociale et économique des communautés *baniyā* durant la période pré-coloniale et coloniale, de manière à montrer comment ces communautés sont devenues les mécènes les plus prestigieux du Puṣṭimārg. Tout au long des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles, imitant la noblesse du Rajasthan, les *baniyā* manifestent publiquement leur prospérité et leur distinction en faisant des offrandes rituelles dans les temples Puṣṭimārg (*sevā*, « service »), ou par le biais de dons remis aux maîtres brahmanes de la tradition, les Gosvāmīs. Alors que la « classe » s'impose comme marqueur d'appartenance sociale dans l'Inde coloniale, les femmes de la haute société Puṣṭimārg tiennent une place essentielle dans l'élaboration du prestige et de la reconnaissance de la famille au sein de l'espace privé. Dans ce travail, je m'intéresse à la manière dont les *baniyā* Puṣṭimārg négocient leur passage dans la modernité. J'examine les questions que posent l'identité sectaire notamment aux hommes *baniyā* dans le contexte des mouvements de réformes sociales

pour les femmes qui ont lieu dans la Province de Bombay au XIX^e et début XX^e siècle (par exemple dans le très connu « Cas Mahārāj Libel » en 1862).

Pour comprendre les pratiques religieuses des femmes ainsi que leur rôle dans la reconnaissance de la communauté, je m'appuie également sur des sources traditionnelles, telle que la littérature hagiographique Puṣṭimārg (*vārtās*) et les chants de dévotion *dhol* ou *garbā* composés par les femmes. L'analyse des *vārtās* montre le rôle social de ces femmes et leur place dans l'imaginaire Puṣṭimārg. Elle révèle également que les genres réservés aux femmes constituent un pendant important aux chants liturgiques officiels et plus célèbres des temples Puṣṭimārg. Dans le dernier chapitre de cette thèse, une approche ethnographique permet de montrer comment, dans le contexte contemporain, le mélange de culture matériel et spirituel est perceptible dans des rituels privés de plus en plus tournés vers la consommation ainsi que l'acquisition et l'exposition d'objets religieux dans la maison. Récemment, des femmes de la haute société Puṣṭimārg ont commencé à prendre des leçons sur ce qu'elles considèrent comme le style « classique » des temples, la musique *havelī*. L'ensemble de ces phénomènes confère aux femmes les rôles de productrice, actrice et témoin de l'identité Puṣṭimārg chez les élites. Les formes matérielles de la dévotion dans l'espace domestique, de même que les pratiques religieuses des femmes (la pratique quotidienne du *sevā*, l'organisation de réunion à la maison, les leçons de musique au temple) font aujourd'hui de la maison le lieu central du Puṣṭimārg.

Note on Transliteration

Transliterations of Sanskrit and Hindi conform to the conventions outlined in the *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (McGregor 1996). I do not use diacritics for places, for the names of associations or societies (such as Arya Samaj), newspapers, journals, and for the names of persons who lived after the nineteenth century. I adopt diacritics for honorary titles (such as Mahārāj, Gosvāmī) and caste names (with the exception of Brahmin). When secondary sources are quoted, the conventions deployed by the author are reproduced in quotations. I use Sanskrit transliteration over Hindi when referring to the titles of Sanskrit texts and for the names of Vallabhācārya, Viṭṭhalanātha, and Gokulanātha. For all other terms, I use standard Hindi transliteration.

Introduction

Puṣṭimārg, or “the Path of Grace,” is a Vaiṣṇav devotional tradition centered upon the worship of Śrīnāthjī, a localized form of Kṛṣṇa enshrined in the sect’s main pilgrimage center in the town of Nathdwara, Rajasthan. The tradition was established in the sixteenth century by Vallabhācārya (ca. 1479-1531, also known as Vallabha), a Telugu Brahmin, who discovered the *svarūp* (“self-manifestation”) of Śrīnāthjī during his travels in the Braj region of north India.¹ After erecting a small shrine for the image, Vallabha developed a form of devotional worship that came to be known as *sevā* (“service”).² Vallabha and, later, his second son and successor, Viṭṭhalanātha (ca.1516-1586), are said to have embarked on a series of pilgrimage tours across northern and western India in an effort to consolidate support for the burgeoning tradition. In western India, such as Gujarat and Rajasthan, Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha drew followers from a range of social and caste backgrounds – from the poorest agrarian communities to members of the wealthy mercantile elite and political nobility.

¹ Traditional accounts of the “four teaching traditions” (*catuḥ* or *cār sampradāy*) model, which emerge in the early eighteenth century, intend to demonstrate how the four Vaiṣṇav sects of Rāmānand, Keśav Bhaṭṭ Kaśmīrī, Caitanya, and Vallabhācārya are the North Indian expressions of the southern traditions established by Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Viṣṇusvāmī, respectively (Hawley 2011, 160-161). In its broader understanding, “Vaiṣṇav” refers to an individual who worships Viṣṇu or any one of his *avatāras* (“incarnation,” “descent-form”), the most popular of which are Kṛṣṇa and Rām. Finally, although I use the term “sect” as a translation for *sampradāy* throughout this thesis, I want to distance myself from its traditional meaning, which sometimes carries a negative connotation of dissent from a majority group. I am using the term “sect” to describe a specifically South Asian religious phenomenon based on the following definition of *sampradāy*: “a vehicle for transmitting and perpetuating a sacred tradition via a continuous succession of preceptors” (Bennett 1990, 187).

² In the Puṣṭimārg context, the term *svarūp* (Skt. *svarūpa*, “own form”) – and not *mūrti* (“embodiment”) or *vigraha* (“form, figure”), is used to refer to images of Kṛṣṇa-Śrīnāthjī. As a *svarūp*, the image is considered to be the imminent manifestation of god, requiring all the loving attention as a living child-Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, the term *pūjā*, which is understood as a practice bound by formality and selfish intentions, is not used to denote Puṣṭimārg worship. Instead, *sevā* (“service”) is used to describe the sincere and spontaneous actions by which devotees take care of Śrīnāthjī and offer their devotion.

Under the leadership of Viṭṭhalanātha, *sevā* evolved into a deeply aestheticized and opulent form of worship consisting of the temple-based offerings of poetry (*kīrtan*), music, food (*bhog*), and ornamentation (*śṛṅgār*). In Puṣṭimārg temples, commonly referred to as *havelīs* (“mansion”), the sophisticated and rich nature of *sevā* has required generous support from the sect’s elite patrons. Today, for example, the Śrīnāthjī *havelī* in Nathdwara is considered one of the wealthiest temple sites in India (Saha 2004, 2). One significant theme threaded throughout this dissertation is the patronage of Puṣṭimārg by the mercantile communities of Gujarat, the *baniyās*. *Baniyā* patronage of Puṣṭimārg provides an occasion for wealthy merchant and business families to produce merit and social prestige while simultaneously demonstrating their devotion. By hosting festivals at the *havelī*, sponsoring feasts, funding *havelī* renovations, and offering gifts to the *havelī* and their custodians (the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmī or Mahārāj) *baniyās* transmute wealth into moral worth and social respectability.

Most studies of Puṣṭimārg have thus far focused on *havelī*-worship, including the temple traditions of painting, music, and food-offerings (Barz 1976; Bennett 1990, 1993; Beck 1993; Gaston 1997; Taylor 1997; Ho 2006; Ambalal 1987; Lyons 2004; Toomey 1986, 1990, 1992). By exclusively focusing on the *havelī* and their Brahmin male leaders, these lines of academic inquiry have left significant gaps in the study of Puṣṭimārg. The practice of domestic *sevā* and women’s religious roles in the sect represent significant areas of scholarly neglect. These issues, combined with my interest in the production and display of *baniyā* family status and prestige through patterns of religious patronage have given rise to the following queries which animate my work: (1) how does Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā* become implicated in the production of *baniyā* status

and respectability? (2) how are the religious activities of Puṣṭimārg lay women implicated in this process? In seeking to answer these questions, this project constitutes the first academic study to explore Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā* and modes of women’s religious participation in the tradition.

During his travels across India, Vallabha is said to have discovered eight additional *svarūps* of Kṛṣṇa. Collectively, all nine images including that of Śrīnāthjī are known as the *nav-nidhi*, the revered “nine-treasures” of the sect. These *svarūps* were inherited by Viṭṭhalanātha, and before passing away he ensured the continual worship of the *nav-nidhi* by distributing them among his seven male heirs. The subsequent “Seven Houses” of Puṣṭimārg became established through the formal installation of the nine *svarūps* in Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* located in different parts of the country, with the first house retaining possession of the sect’s principal image, Śrīnāthjī.³ With Viṭṭhalanātha’s male descendants, known as Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs, the tradition expanded in a dynastic lineage, and today the Gosvāmī of each major Puṣṭimārg *havelī* can trace their lineage back to Vallabha. Furthermore, since Vallabha himself is considered as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, Gosvāmīs are also traditionally revered by Puṣṭimārgīs as living representatives of Vallabha-Kṛṣṇa.⁴

³ In 1672, the Śrīnāthjī image moved to the town of Sinhad in Rajasthan from Braj when political instability in the Braj region prompted many members of the Puṣṭimārg leadership to migrate to parts of western India. With the formal installation of the Śrīnāthjī *svarūp* in Sinhad, the town was renamed Nathdwara, “gateway to Śrīnāthjī.” The present locations of the nine *svarūps* and the houses to which they belong are as follows: first house: Nathdwara (Śrīnāthjī, Śrīnavnīprijājī and Śrīmathureśjī); second house: Nathdwara (Śrīviṭṭhalnāthjī); third house: Kankrolī (Śrī Dvārakānāthjī); fourth house: Gokul, Braj (Śrī Gokulnāthjī); fifth house: Kamavan (Śrī Gokulcandramājī); sixth house: Varanasi (Śrī Mukundrājī)/Surat (Śrī Bālkṛṣṇājī); seventh house: Kamavan (Śrī Madanmohanjī) (Bennett 1993, 52).

⁴ In the seventeenth century hagiography, the *Śrī Nāthjī ke Prākāṣya ki Vārtā*, Vallabha’s birth is described as occurring simultaneously as the emergence of the Śrīnāthjī *svarūp*, specifically with the mouth of the *svarūp*. For this reason, Vallabha is traditionally accepted as the *mukhāvatāra* (“incarnation of the mouth”) of Kṛṣṇa (Barz 1992, 24-30).

Despite the “officially” male public face of contemporary Puṣṭimārg, women are very much at the centre of the life of the sect. The place of women in the Puṣṭimārg tradition is complex, and in many ways, contentious. Although we can sense their presence in the historical record (for example, in hagiographic texts and devotional literature attributed to female figures), scholarly representations cast Puṣṭimārg as an almost exclusively male tradition and lineage. It is this paradox of the “absent-yet-present” Puṣṭimārgī woman that has given rise to many of the questions that form the basis of this dissertation. Moreover, although most Puṣṭimārg followers perform domestic worship in their homes – a practice which I argue is central to maintaining their sectarian identity – it is surprising that there has not been a single comprehensive study on this topic, until now.

I suggest that one of the reasons why Puṣṭimārg may be under-represented in academic literature is because the sect and its elite adherents were at the center of an historical controversy. This controversy, dramatized in the colonial courts of the Bombay Presidency, represented the culmination of reform efforts led by the leading Gujarati reformers of the mid-nineteenth century. The highly gendered reform discourses, which informed the public disparagement of Puṣṭimārg and its *baniyā* followers, are the subject of chapter three of this dissertation. As I discuss in the chapter, the opulent lifestyles of the wealthy Bombay *baniyā* merchants, combined with their apathy towards English education, made them the focus of reformist debates in the Bombay Presidency. *Baniyā* patronage of Puṣṭimārg, especially their allegiance to and reverence of Gosvāmīs, drew the critique of well-known Gujarati reformers such as Karsondas Mulji (1832-1871). The Gosvāmīs, themselves, were publically criticized in vernacular and English newspapers

and through the circulation of handbills for several years in the late 1850s. The Gosvāmīs were condemned for their own lavish lifestyles and the favouritism they displayed towards their wealthy patrons. However, the most significant allegation put forth by reformers concerned the Gosvāmīs’ alleged sexual promiscuity and their sexual exploitation of female devotees. This public defamation culminated in the publication of an article by Karsondas Mulji in his Gujarati reformist paper in the year 1860. In the article, Mulji declared Puṣṭimārg to be a heterodox sect – in relation to Vedic religion – since it was only founded in the sixteenth century. He also accused the Gosvāmīs of grossly manipulating the sect’s ideologies by dishonouring the wives and daughters of their followers by having sexual relations with them. In his article, Mulji named one Gosvāmī by name, Jadunathji Mahārāj from Surat, who subsequently filed a libel suit against Mulji.

The libel case, popularly referred to as the “Mahārāj Libel Case,” began in the early months of 1862. The case served as a forum for the British court and reformers such as Mulji to interrogate the “authenticity” of the Puṣṭimārg sect and the authority of Gosvāmīs as religious figures. The case was seen as a victory for reformers on grounds of morality and reason. The swift circulation in both English and Gujarati newspapers of the court’s proceedings from the libel case helped to reify reformist efforts to malign the Puṣṭimārg sect, its leaders, and its wealthy merchant followers. Thus, with the exception of a few scholarly writings, almost every English-language source alluding to the Puṣṭimārg sect, to this day, filters their discussion of Puṣṭimārg through the prism of the events surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case.

In this introductory chapter I lay out the foundations of this dissertation by presenting three important themes that inform my work: 1) domesticity and domestic *sevā* in Puṣṭimārg; 2) women’s devotional practices and “domestic rituals”; and, 3) the relationship between religious patronage and the production of class status. I will then present a literature review, my research methodology, and the chapter breakdown.

I. Domestic *Sevā* and Domesticity in Puṣṭimārg

The beginnings of domestic *sevā* in Puṣṭimārg are somewhat ambiguous. This project does not seek to clarify this ambiguity nor does it necessarily attempt to historicize women’s roles as performers of domestic *sevā* in Puṣṭimārg. The primary concern of this thesis is to demonstrate how the practice of domestic *sevā* and women’s religious activities help produce family status and prestige in the elite *baniyā* communities of Gujarat. A focus on domestic *sevā*, as opposed to temple *sevā*, allows us to chart women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg as a whole, and though I map the presence of women in the tradition’s historical contexts, I do this with a view to better understand today’s Puṣṭimārg.

Domestic and familial imagery permeate every aspect of Puṣṭimārg ritual culture. Both Puṣṭimārg liturgy and theology approach the worship of god as child (*vātsalya bhāv*) and a Puṣṭimārg temple in most parts of northern and western India is not called *mandir* – the common Hindi term used for “temple” – but are known as an *havelī*, literally “house” or “mansion” (specifically, “Nandālaya,” the home of Nanda and Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa’s foster-parents). Structurally and conceptually *sevā* is domestically orientated; it consists of participating in or reproducing the quotidian activities or *līlās*

(“divine sports”) of Śrīnāthjī as he lived in Braj, such as when he is awakened (*maṅgal*), is dressed and adorned (*śṛṅgār*), plays with his friends (*gvāl*), is fed his mid-day meal (*rāj-bhog*), and is placed to sleep at night (*śayan*).⁵ As householders who marry, have children, and live in their home-*havelīs*, the *havelī* is traditionally accepted as the home of both Kṛṣṇa and the Gosvāmī.⁶

Gosvāmīs negotiate their dual status as house-holders and Brahmin religious leaders in particular ways. On the one hand, although the hereditary leaders of the sect are Brahmin men (as in other *bhakti* sectarian movements) Puṣṭimārg’s own *bhakti* ethos eschewed and subverted Brahminic orthodoxy and asceticism in favor of an emotionally engaging and personal devotional practice. These themes are illustrated in Puṣṭimārg hagiographical literatures, such as the seventeenth-century *Caurāsi Vaiṣṇavan Vārtās* and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan Vārtās*, the didactic tales of the disciples initiated by Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha respectively. Such hagiographical literature, as well as Sanskrit and vernacular works composed by Vallabha and other Puṣṭimārg theologians, like Harirāy (traditional dates, 1591-1716), stress devotional practices that center upon

⁵ In *havelī* contexts, the *sevā* of Śrīnāthjī is structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as *jhānkis* (“glimpses”). Each of these viewing-periods last approximately fifteen minutes and are accompanied by the singing of devotional songs (*kīrtans*) and music, and backdrop paintings are hung – all of which serve to enhance and invoke the specific *līlā* or mood of each *jhānki*. Although the timings may vary from one *havelī* to the next, the liturgical cycle is as follows: 5am-7am: *maṅgal* (Kṛṣṇa is awakened); 7am-8am: *śṛṅgār* (the *svarūp* is adorned); 8am-9am: *gvāl* (Kṛṣṇa is displayed as walking in the pasture with cows, and playing with his friends); 10am-11am: *rājbhog* (the most ornate of them, when Kṛṣṇa is presented with his mid-day meal); 4-4:30pm: *utthāpan* (after an afternoon nap, Kṛṣṇa has wandered off in the pastures with his friends and is called to return); 5-5:30pm: *sandhyā* (Kṛṣṇa is offered a light meal); 6-6:30pm: *śayan* (Kṛṣṇa has gone to bed for the night). The *sevā* structure also varies according to seasons and festivals.

⁶ The status of the *havelī* as both the abode of Kṛṣṇa and the home (or domestic property) of the Gosvāmī became a contentious issue in the late 1950s and 1960s when the Bombay Public Trust Act was passed in 1950. Under this act, and the previous Charitable and Religious Trust Act (1920), all religious institutions and charitable trusts were deemed “public” and, thus, came under the administration of the state/Indian government. For decades, Gosvāmīs and their family members, engaged in legal battles to revoke the status of the *havelī* as public or state property. For excerpts from such court cases as well as a Puṣṭimārg perspective on these issues, see Shyam Manohar Gosvāmī’s *Ādhunik Nyāy-Pranālī aur Puṣṭimārgīya Sādhanā-Pranālī kā Āpsī Takrāv* (2006).

the family and are located within the household, in addition to – or in contrast to – temple *sevā*.⁷ The rhetoric of domesticity, with its emphasis on performing *sevā* in the home, preparing elaborate food-offerings, and worshipping Śrīnāthjī as a child, was undoubtedly an important vehicle for Puṣṭimārg community formation.

On the other hand, Gosvāmīs ground themselves in Brahmanic authority by composing Sanskrit treatises and prescribing orthodox prescriptions of ritual purity and pollution for performing *sevā* (*apras sevā* > *asparṣa*, “un-touched”).⁸ Vallabha composed all of his works in Sanskrit, including the *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*, his major theological work, the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*, sixteen treatises delineating his philosophical (Śuddhādvaita) and devotional (Puṣṭimārg) systems, and by writing commentaries on important treatises such as the *Brahmasūtras* (his *Anubhāṣya*) and on several cantos of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (his *Subodhinī*). Viṭṭhalanātha, also contributed to the Puṣṭimārg Sanskrit literary tradition by writing commentaries on Vallabha’s writings and through composing his own major works. As religious leaders who marry, however, Gosvāmīs, beginning with Vallabha, belong to the householder tradition (*grhastha-āśrama*). There

⁷ For example, in verses two and three of the *Bhaktivardhinī*, one of Vallabha’s sixteen Sanskrit treatises (*Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*), Vallabha explains how the “seed of love” (*bhakti-bīja*) matures: “the way to make this seed take firm root is to remain a householder and follow one’s rule of life. The one who is not distracted should devote himself to Krishna by means of ritual image-worship, and by “hearing” and so forth [nine steps of *bhakti*]” (Redington 125, 2000; Skt., “*bījadārḍhyaprakārstu gr̥he sthitvā svadharmataḥ| avyāvṛtto bhajetkṛṣṇam pūjayā śravaṇādibhiḥ*”). The *Bade Śikṣāpatra* is a seventeenth-century manual of precepts that teaches the fundamentals of Puṣṭimārg *sevā*. It consists of Harirāy’s Sanskrit writings and his brother, Gopeśvar’s (b.1593), Brajbhāṣā commentaries. Several verses and their commentaries (such as verse four) allude to the practice of domestic *sevā* (Arney 517, 2007).

⁸ An adherence to strict purity rules while performing *sevā* is known as *apras sevā* or “un-touched” *sevā*. It requires a person to bathe before performing *sevā* and to not come in contact with any polluting substance prior to commencing their practice. This includes not being touched by any person who is not in a state of ritual purity. *Apras sevā* also involves wearing clothing that has been washed by the practitioner and which has remained untouched throughout the drying process. Sometimes, practitioners dip their clothing in water right before dressing to ensure the maintenance of ritual purity. The food prepared for *sevā* must also not be seen or touched by anyone who is not a state of ritual purity before it is offered to Kṛṣṇa. *Sāttvik* or “pure” food-items are offered, such as milk, certain fruits, grains, nuts, sweets made of milk, et cetera. Non-vegetarian food or *rājsik* (“passion-inducing”) foods, such as onion and garlic, are never offered.

has also been no prevalent tradition of asceticism in the history of Puṣṭimārg as it exists in other Vaiṣṇav traditions, which do have lineages of ascetic-*ācāryās* (“teachers”), such as in Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇavism, Vārkarī Vaiṣṇavism, Śrīvaiṣṇavism, and the Svāmīnārāyaṇ *sampradāy*.⁹

Gujarati *baniyās* – who, from the time of Puṣṭimārg’s arrival in Gujarat held a high social and ritual status – are drawn to Puṣṭimārg precisely because it offers a ritual culture which follows upper-caste orthodox purity/pollution prescriptions and yet is informed by a “this-worldly” theology and domestic rhetoric. Instead of ascetic withdrawal and renunciation, devotional practices are structured on, and are embedded in, family/kinship ties. Indeed, the Puṣṭimārg initiation *mantra* requires the relinquishing of one’s *man*, *tan*, and *dhan* or mind, body, and wealth/worldly “possessions” to Kṛṣṇa.¹⁰

⁹ According to Vallabha, it is Puṣṭimārg’s emphasis on Kṛṣṇa’s grace for liberation that distinguishes it from *maryādāmārg*, “the path of limitations.” *Maryādāmārg* is characterized by an adherence to Vedic prescriptions, as well as a reliance on knowledge (*jñāna*) and asceticism (*sanyāsa*) as a means to attaining union with Brahman (*mokṣa*). Those on the *maryādāmārg* do not perform *sevā*, but rather perform *pūjā*, which according to Vallabha is a “selfish” form of worship, done with expectations of rewards (Bennett 1993, 75). Vallabha maintains that those devotees who worship selfishly and believe that the attainment of liberation is dependent upon their own efforts are susceptible to being more egoistic and thus remain in a state of *avidyā* (ignorance). It is perhaps for this reason that in his treatise, *Samnyāsaniṛṇayaḥ*, Vallabha explains how pride (*abhimāna*) is a characteristic of a *samnyāsi* or an ascetic. Most often, ascetics believe that through performing renunciation and various austerities they will achieve liberation. This characteristic or pride is in opposition to the humility and helplessness that characterize Puṣṭimārg devotees (Redington 2000, 167). One should not, however, be left with the impression that Vallabha was completely against adopting *samnyāsa* or *tyāga* (“renunciation”). In another Sanskrit treatise, the *Samnyāsaniṛṇayaḥ*, Vallabha does maintain that one may renounce the world in the “advanced stages of devotion, and it is ‘for the sake of experiencing separation’ (*virahānubhavārtham*)” (v.7-9a, Redington 168).

¹⁰ Initiation into Puṣṭimārg occurs in the form of two rites, both of which occur in the presence of a Gosvāmī, a direct descendent of Vallabha who is thus also considered an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa himself. The first rite, *nām nivedan*, occurs at a fairly young age (six-seven years of age), in which an individual receives and recites the eight-syllable *mantra*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama* (“Śrī Kṛṣṇa is my refuge”). The second rite, which constitutes an individual’s formal initiation into the tradition, consists of receiving and reciting the longer *ātmanivedan/Brahmsambandh* *mantra*. At this point the initiate also receives their own personal *svārūp* of Kṛṣṇa, which the Gosvāmī has consecrated by bathing it in *pancāmṛta* (the five “nectars” of curds, milk, ghee, honey, and sugar) and offers the *svārūp prasād* (consecrated food offering) from a previously consecrated *svārūp*. Through reciting the *mantra* one dedicates themselves and all that belongs to them to Kṛṣṇa: “Om. Kṛṣṇa is my refuge [*Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama*]. Tortured for thousands of years now by the pain born of separation from Krishna so that joy has disappeared, I offer to the Blessed Lord Krishna my body, senses, life-breath, and inner faculties, with all their attributes, and wife, home, children

Puṣṭimārgīs are, thus, free to pursue wealth and prosperity so long as they dedicate all their worldly belongings to Kṛṣṇa first.

Although Puṣṭimārg ritual praxis is immersed in domestic imagery, it is surprising that the *practice* of domestic *sevā* itself has never been a subject of academic inquiry. In this thesis, I discuss the performance of domestic *sevā* and other religious activities women engage in within the home, such as *satsaṅg* (“religious discourse”), *bhāgavat kathā* (discourses on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), *bhajan-kīrtan* sessions (singing of devotional songs), and *havelī* music lessons. I bring this discussion into conversation with nineteenth-century gender and domestic reform movements, as well as twentieth-century nationalist and consumer ideologies, which have politicized the home by reconstituting it as a site of cultural and social production. The home is a place where caste, gender, and class politics are embedded in – and reproduced through – quotidian actions and kinship relations. In this project, I see the urban upper-class Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* home as a modern site of religious patronage. The home, thus, simultaneously serves three functions: 1) as the space of religious practice; 2) the arena in which women ensure comfort and respectability through the supervision of household tasks and the maintenance of social ties; 3) as the site of family status reproduction.

II. Domestic Rituals, Women, and the Practice of *Bhakti*

Since this thesis is partially concerned with exploring women’s domestic *sevā* practices, it is necessary to unpack the meaning of the phrase “domestic rituals.” I understand women’s “domestic rituals” as those religious actions which take place in (but

and acquired wealth here and hereafter, along with my very self. I am your servant, Krishna, I am yours” (Redington 2000, 67).

are not limited to) the spatial boundaries of a home, such as the performance of worship of household deities or the celebration of calendric and religious festivals, such as Divālī and Navarātrī. Domestic rituals can also be religious practices that are tied to “domestic” or familial concerns and which are informed by traditional views on gender roles and marriage. Such rituals, which normally also take place in the home, include rites of passage like pregnancy rituals (*sīmanta*), as well as *vratas* or *nōṅpus* (“votive observances”) performed by women to ensure their husbands’ longevity and marital/domestic well-being. For the most part, scholarship on Hindu women and their religious practices has been filtered through this latter understanding of domestic rituals. That is to say, the subject of Hindu women’s religious lives in academic literature has remained limited to discussions of married women’s auspiciousness and the rituals and/or votive observances which these women perform in order to maintain their auspicious status as married women or *sumāṅgalīs*.¹¹ Furthermore, Hindu women’s actions – whether they are religious practices or not – are normally read through the double-bind modalities of “compliance” and “submission,” on the one hand, or “resistance” and “subversion” on the other hand.¹² This becomes especially true when discussing women’s roles in *bhakti* or devotional traditions.

Bhakti, itself, has been construed as a revolutionary “movement” which sought to subvert Brahmanic orthodoxy by giving a voice and providing an alternate religious

¹¹ See, for example, Hancock (1995, 1999); Harlan (2007); Leslie (1992); McGee (1991, 1996); Nagarajan (2007); Pearson (1996); Pintchman (2005); Wadley (1991, 2004).

¹² See Hancock (1995, 1999); McDaniel (2007); Pearson (1996); Raheja and Gold (1994); Ramanujan (1982).

path to members of the lower castes and women.¹³ Some scholars have noted that *bhakti*'s egalitarian ethos has remained limited to the sphere of ideology without effecting any real change in the social lives of low-caste and female practitioners.¹⁴ However, the popular view of *bhakti* as a mode for transcending caste, class, and gender restrictions may explain why a plethora of sources emphasize the “subversive” aspects of *bhakti*, especially when it centers on the religious lives of women. For example, most studies of women in the *bhakti* context tend to conflate the “female *bhakta*” – a female practitioner of *bhakti* – with the female “poet-saint,” and subsequently these studies focus on extraordinary historical figures such as Mīrābāī, Āṅṅāl, Karaikkālammai, Akkā Mahādevī, Janābāī, Muktabāī, and Bahiṅābāī who “defy social norms and taboos,” “overturn models of femininity,” or “overturn caste hierarchy” (Ramanujan 1982, 318-319).¹⁵ Interestingly, Bahiṅābāī (1628-1700), of the Vārkarī Vaiṣṇav tradition in Maharashtra, is usually singled out as an “exception” among this group of female *bhaktas* for she married *and* practiced *bhakti*. As Anne Feldhaus has argued: “...Bahiṅā Bāī presents herself as someone who has achieved what these others did not: she managed to reconcile her duties to her husband with her devotion to God and his saints” (1982, 593). Mary McGee also echoes this sentiment more than a decade later when she writes that

¹³ For more on early twentieth-century nationalist constructions of *bhakti* as a pan-Indian, egalitarian “movement” or *āṅḍolan* see Hawley (2007). Similarly, for the ways in which *bhakti* came to represent “Hindu religion” in, and through, the works of Hariscandra of Benaras (1850-85), see Dalmia (1997).

¹⁴ Regarding *bhakti*'s inability to effect any transformation in the social realities of lower castes David Lorenzen demonstrates how “The only significant rejection of caste among Hindu sects is found in Virasaivism, in *nirguni* sects such as the Kabir and Ravidas Panths, and to a lesser extent in the Arya Samaj” (2004, 10 qtd. in Burchett 2009). In Patton Burchett's study on the hagiographies of four “untouchable” *bhakti*-saints (Tiruppāṅ Āṅṅār, Nandaṅār, Chokhāmeḷā, and Raidās), he argues how “...a closer reading shows that, in subtle ways, these stories also reinforce the social hierarchy and confirm Brahmins as possessing a social identity of higher purity and value than any other” (116-117).

¹⁵ Authors who have focused on some of these female poet-saints include Craddock (2007); Feldhaus (1982); Harlan (1995); Martin-Kershaw (1995); McGee (1995); Ramaswamy (1997); Ramanujan (1982); Sellegren (1996); Venkatesan (2010); Zelliott (2000).

“...most women bhaktas were rather extraordinary, as they defied the model of the traditional Hindu woman and housewife. Bahiṇābāī is the exception to this female bhakta paradigm...Bahiṇābāī not only married, but remained with her husband even after undergoing spiritual initiation, giving birth to two children” (McGee 1995, 116). In such literature, the roles of a woman as religious practitioner and wife (or mother, daughter-in-law) are cast as contradictory, as identities which exist on opposite ends of a spectrum that somehow must be “reconciled.”

In this project I propose a shift in focus to the everyday female practitioner, such as the lay Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav woman, who is part of a *bhakti* tradition, performs daily *sevā*, and is married and has children. Moreover, if one wants to focus on female *bhaktas* who composed poetry – and are yet not revered as “poets-saints” – the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs who remained married and had children provide examples of historical women whose devotional compositions are popularly sung today. However, throughout my thesis, I do not present such women as “exceptions.” Nor do I necessarily read their devotional practices as mechanisms for either “subverting” or “complying with” Brahmanic orthodoxy and patriarchal values.

Mary Hancock is one of the few scholars who has written succinctly about the domestic religious practices of “every-day” Hindu women (1995, 1999). Her brilliant study has centered on women who belong to the urban Brahmin *smārta* community of Chennai. Although I draw heavily from Hancock’s work, I distance myself from her bifocal reading of devotional activities as sites which constitute “compliance with” or “resistance to” “notions of sexual and domestic order” (1995, 61). Following Saba Mahmood (2005), I think it is important to realize how analyzing women’s actions “... in

terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is necessarily to reduce the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of domination” (174). Furthermore, resistance taken as a pseudonym for “agency” also limits the different modalities agency takes and “the grammar of concepts in which its particular affect, meaning, and form resides” (188). Read through the western feminist hermeneutic of “resistance” and “subversion,” *bhakti* is usually positioned as a vehicle for women to temporarily circumvent or opt-out of their quotidian activities and identities as wives, mothers, and daughter-in-laws. One of the primary problems I see with this paradigm is that women’s roles as wife/mother/daughter-in-law are cast as monolithic social-identities which are then taken as emblematic of the oppressive forces of “Brahmanic orthodoxy and patriarchy.” *Bhakti* practices are presented as agentive moments of rupture or resistance, which some-how exist in a vacuum and remain unmarked and disassociated from the influences of caste, gender, and class politics. Or, taken as (non-agentive) moments of reconciliation and compliance, devotional practices are cast as mechanisms for suturing one’s role as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law on the one hand, and one’s role as a *bhakti* practitioner, on the other hand. In this project, I see women’s experiences of devotion and their devotional practices, which punctuate their quotidian activities (such as waking, bathing, eating, socializing), as part of the every-day corporeal, emotional, and moral processes which are constitutive of identity formation and female subjectivity.

Having said that, I acknowledge that devotional practices can sometimes present opportunities for women to negotiate with orthodox value-systems. For example, religious practices informed by Brahmanic notions of purity/pollution and women’s

auspiciousness/inauspiciousness, normally exclude those women who are in a state of ritual pollution (such as during menstruation, post-partum) and have an inauspiciousness status (such as widows) from performing and participating in rituals. In the Puṣṭimārg context, however, orthodox perspectives on ritual purity/pollution and auspiciousness/inauspiciousness seem to function along a gradient rather than as polarities. That is to say, women who follow strict rules of *apras sevā* do not perform *sevā* during times of menses, while other women do. Widows – considered “inauspicious” by the standards of Brahmanic orthodoxy – also perform *sevā* daily and participate in Puṣṭimārg religious festivals.

Puṣṭimārg *sevā* practices performed by women are not circumscribed by normative ideologies of auspiciousness, which includes maintaining one’s status as a *sumāṅgalī* or married woman. Should this be read as an example of Puṣṭimārg *sevā* being “subversive” of, or “resistant,” to Brahmanic ritual orthodoxy and patriarchy? Not necessarily. Instead, I prefer to read Puṣṭimārg lay women’s religious practices as opportunities for understanding and approaching Hindu women’s religious lives that moves beyond the well-rehearsed model of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness. Puṣṭimārg religious practices, like other quotidian actions which women perform, are informed by and are embedded in the reproduction of gender, caste, and class politics. Devotional practices cannot (only) be understood through the opposing modalities of “compliance”/ “resistance.” They are constitutive of the everyday heterogeneity of women’s social realities, and represent the fluidity – and not the contradictions – that exist between women’s identities and roles as family-women and devotees.

III. Religious Patronage and the Production of Status

Understanding how patterns of religious patronage facilitate the production of status and respectability among the wealthy *baniyā* communities of Gujarat is another central theme I explore in this project. My study of this theme anchors itself on the work of scholars who highlight the relationship between class formation, consumerism, and religious practices, including Joanne Waghorne (2004), Mary Hancock (1999), Partha Chatterjee (1993), Sumanta Banerjee (1989a; 1989b) Douglas Haynes (1991), Christine Dobbin (1972), and Vineeta Sinha (2011).

In chapter one I discuss how the entrepreneurial and proselytizing efforts of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attracted the support of royal patrons as well as the following of elite Gujarati *baniyā* merchant “princes” or *śeṭhs*. The wealthy *baniyā* communities of Gujarat facilitated the circulation of capital through trans-regional networks of loan and exchange services, which even members of the ruling classes relied upon. As socio-political and economic ties were established between the political nobility and influential merchants and bankers, their mutual patronage of Puṣṭimārg also served as a common cultural link between these two elite groups. Just as the munificence of kings was displayed through their religious patronage activities, merchant *śeṭhs* also demonstrated and produced their status through patterns of religious giving.

In his study, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India* (1991), Haynes makes note of the ways Gujarati merchant families and firms sought to establish and maintain their *ābrū*, which is understood as both a merchant’s “credit” and social respectability or moral character (56). In an effort to generate and display their *ābrū* or social status, *baniyā śeṭhs*

hosted prestigious weddings and engaged in forms of philanthropy. They also made financial contributions to Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* and their Gosvāmīs, and helped organize feasts to honor Gosvāmīs on special occasions, such as religious holidays or for a Gosvāmī’s marriage and sacred-thread ceremonies (65). Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984), I see the patronage of an influential sect like Puṣṭimārg as a key mechanism for the reproduction of symbolic capital among members of the *baniyā* community for whom social prestige and community trust are of utmost importance – especially for their financial prosperity. As Bourdieu explains, “the exhibition of the material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is likely to be in itself a source of material profit in a good-faith economy in which good repute is the best, if not the only, economic guarantee” (1977, 180).

In chapters two and three I explore how the Gujarati *baniyā* community is influenced by the processes of colonial modernity, such as English education, the colonial economy, and social and religious reform. “Class” as a social category signifying one’s status is an important development of modernity. The middle-classes, especially, as the products and producers of modernity come to define what it means to be “modern” in colonial contexts (Joshi 2012, 29). Among the many transformations of this period, the legal and economic developments of the colonial regime required one to train to become a functioning civil servant of the Rāj. English education was introduced as a vehicle for participating in the new economic context; however, it was also promoted as a civilizing force and a bastion of technological and scientific progress. On the one hand, members of the traditionally learned upper-castes were drawn to these new public institutions and the civil job market of the Bombay Presidency quickly became saturated

with positions in accounting, teaching, journalism, and clerkship. On the other hand, as the champions of modernity, Brahmin middle-class intellectuals also promoted a movement towards social and religious reform.

Nineteenth century and early twentieth century reform efforts informed changes in gender, religious, and political ideologies, many of which resonate to this day. With the separation and gendering of public and domestic spheres through these discourses, women became reconstituted as the bearers of family respectability and status. The urban home, another marker of modernity, also became the site of cultural and social production. As I demonstrate in chapter three, in addition to economic factors such as income and occupation, or even one's caste and family background, family class and status was determined by the degree to which women from respectable households could negotiate modernity – here, represented through education, changes in consumer practices, home-management – and “tradition,” such as observing *strī-dharma* (“women's duties”), engaging in religious practices, and ensuring the harmony of the joint-family. As Partha Chatterjee (1993) and Sanjay Joshi (2001, 2012) remind us, although the middle-classes fashioned themselves as the bearers of modernity, “Their belief in modernization coexisted with the reinforcing of older hierarchies, their nationalism was complicit with what has been termed ‘communalism,’ and their belief in progress coexisted with their advocacy of tradition” (Joshi 2012, 31). Thus, to understand the ways in which the middle-classes engaged in their own identity and political self-construction, we need to move beyond traditional Weberian approaches to class, which stress the rise of industrial capitalism and economic factors such as income and

occupation.¹⁶

Unlike the educated middle-classes, the upper-classes – represented by individuals like the wealthy Gujarati *baniyā śeṭhs* – were initially able to adapt to the new colonial economy. Until the rise of professional jobs in law or medicine, men from these families did not need to enter western institutes of higher learning in order to better their social standing. Instead, many *baniyā śeṭhs*, including Puṣṭimārg *baniyās*, participated in the expansion of the cotton-mill industry by establishing their own mills throughout Gujarat in the latter-half of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. By hosting lavish weddings, adopting new aesthetic tastes and consumption practices, building English-styled bungalows and, indeed, continuing with opulent forms of religious giving, the *baniyā śeṭhs* played a role in defining what it meant to be “upper-class” at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the twentieth century, however, especially in India’s post-liberalization economic context (1980s-1990s), class culture and identity came to be increasingly determined by consumer practices and through the acquisition of commodities. In the upper-class Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* family, women’s growing roles as consumers has also

¹⁶ The intersections between urbanization, religion, and the rising middle class in Europe permeated many of Weber’s social theories. In his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2006; first published as a two-part article in 1904-05), Weber argues that the austere lifestyle promoted by the “this worldly asceticism” and “spiritual” work ethic of Calvinist Protestantism created the necessary conditions for the accumulation of capital which led to, or at least favored, the rise of modern capitalism in Europe. In his *Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (1967), Weber applied his thesis of the “spirit of capitalism” to the religious traditions of India. On the whole Weber concludes that despite the existence of affluent merchant classes (in the Parsi, Jain, and Vaiṣṇav communities), religious views have impeded the rise of “rational” capitalism in India. He implicates the caste system in making “impossible the development of large-scale enterprises” (1967, 111-133). With regard to Puṣṭimārg in particular, although Weber acknowledges how the sect includes one of the largest number of business people, he describes it as a “holy path [that] is in no way ethically rational,” and is therefore inconsistent with Protestant ethics and its “spirit of capitalism” (1967, 316). His study is limited and laden with Orientalist baggage: for example, he describes the tradition as one “that seeks the holy, in opposition to the intellectual tradition, not in asceticism or contemplation but in refined sublimated Krishna orgies” (315).

allowed for new and creative material expressions of status, aesthetic tastes, and religious sensibilities. Building on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and Mary Hancock (1999), I understand that Puṣṭimārg women’s domestic rituals, like other cultural practices, have been “transformed by contestatory nationalisms, transnational processes, commodification, and class formation” (Hancock 25). Women’s *sevā* demonstrates the extension of consumer cultures to ritual praxis. As sites of cultural consumption and display, religious practices thus reinforce women’s identities as Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs and also reify their class privilege. As I discuss in the final chapter of this thesis, increasing commodified styles of domestic *sevā*, the display of expensive religious commodities in the home, as well as the growing desire among elite women to learn how to sing Puṣṭimārg *havelī* liturgy music in a “classical” style, are all practices that help reproduce differences and social hierarchies between members of the Puṣṭimārg community. Bringing together the three major themes of this dissertation – domesticity, women’s religious practices, and status production – I demonstrate how all these processes have recast the urban home as a modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

Literature Review

As noted above, I suggest that one of the primary reasons why academic work on Puṣṭimārg has remained somewhat limited is due to the reform debates surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case. The paucity of literature on Puṣṭimārg is reflected even in today’s scholarship. For example, in two edited volumes on “Kṛṣṇa” published in the last decade in which contributions were made by leading scholars of Vaiṣṇav studies, with the exception of one translation of Harirāy’s *Bade Śikṣāpatra* (a *sevā* guide), there is no

essay on Puṣṭimārg theology, philosophy, and ritual culture.¹⁷ Thus far, studies of Puṣṭimārg in the English language have focused on temple worship, dealing exclusively with its traditions of music, painting, and ritual food-offerings.¹⁸ Peter Bennett’s study on Puṣṭimārg *havelī* culture in the pilgrimage city of Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh (1993) provides a comprehensive introduction to temple *sevā* practices and to the Vallabha-*kul* or Gosvāmī lineage. In this work, as well as in his excellent essay, *In Nanda Baba’s House* (1990), Bennett portrays *sevā* as an *alaukika* (“other-worldly”) emotional experience (1990, 198). He does this by interpreting all aspects of temple *sevā* – such as the songs sung during liturgy, the backdrop paintings hung behind the *svarūp*, and the food-offerings presented to the deity – through Sanskrit aesthetic theories on *bhāva* (“emotion”) and *rasa* (“relish,” “taste”). However, studies such as Bennett’s, which focus on temple *sevā* and the Gosvāmī lineage, cast Puṣṭimārg as an exclusively temple-centered tradition. This has come at the expense of excluding an important dimension of Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity formation and maintenance, namely, the practice of domestic *sevā*. The purpose of my project is to present a counter-point to claims made by scholars like Bennett, who argue that “temple worship tends to be the principal means by which these householder initiates demonstrate and participate in their faith” (1993, 12).

In addition to temple *sevā*, Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy has also been an area of scholarly focus and there have been several attempts made to translate the

¹⁷ The two volumes I am referring to are *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity* (ed. Guy Beck, 2005) and *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (ed. Edwin F. Bryant, 2007).

¹⁸ Scholars whom have worked on Puṣṭimārg traditions of music include: Beck (1993); Gaston (1997); Ho (2006); Sanford (2008); Taylor (1997); for painting see: Ambalal (1987); Lyons (2004); and for work on Puṣṭimārgī ritual food-offerings refer to: Bennett (1983, 1990, 1993); Toomey (1986, 1990, 1992).

works of Vallabha into English.¹⁹ In his well-known book, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya* (1976), Richard Barz also presents an introduction to Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy. However, he provides an overview of Puṣṭimārg hagiographic literature, and offers a few translations of the Brajhbhāṣā *vārtās* which describe the lives of the poet-saints initiated by Vallabha. In a later essay (1994), he discusses how the *vārtās* function as an important vehicle for disseminating key Puṣṭimārg theological concepts.

With regards to Puṣṭimārg hagiographical literature, Hariharināth Ṭaṇḍan's Hindi work, *Vārtā sāhitya: Ek Br̥hat Adhyayan* (1960), remains the most comprehensive study on the *vārtā* literature. Other scholars who have touched upon the subject of Puṣṭimārg *vārtās* include essays by Charlotte Vaudeville (1976; 1980), Vasudha Dalmia (2001a; 2001b), and Saha (2006). In *Forging Community* (2001a), Dalmia presents some of the processes involved in Puṣṭimārg community formation as they are presented in the *vārtā* narratives, particularly in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Vārtā* (CVV). One of the important concerns of the CVV is to demonstrate the charismatic and mediating role of Vallabha as a *guru*. Other themes in the *vārtās* which Dalima highlights include Puṣṭimārg's devaluation of Brahmanic ritual orthodoxy and asceticism in favour of devotional practices which center on the family and take place in the home. As Dalmia argues, this form of domestic devotion and *sevā* “– at once intimate and transcendent, unmediated by brahmanical ritual... was obviously the radical innovation of its time” (2001a, 134).

¹⁹ Works on Puṣṭimārgī theology and philosophy (Śuddhādvaita) include: Marfatia (1967); Narain (2004); Parekh (1969); Shah (1969); Telivala (1980); Timm (1992). In his *Vallbhācārya on The Love Games of Kṛṣṇa* (1990) James D. Redington translated an excerpt of Vallabha's Sanskrit commentaries on one of the most important Vaiṣṇava theological treatises, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. He has recently also translated Vallabha's sixteen philosophical treatises known as the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ* (*The Grace of Lord Krishna: The Sixteen Verse-Treatises of Vallabhacharya*), 2000.

In her other essay on the *vārtās*, “Women, Duty, and Sanctified Space in the Vaiṣṇava Hagiography of the Seventeenth Century” (2001b), Dalmia again demonstrates how the CVV narratives reveal Puṣṭimārg’s unique *bhakti* ethos, although this time in relation to the status of women. By examining tales which revolve around female initiates, including one about a woman (a “Rājputānī”) who refuses to perform *sati*, Dalmia explains how the *bhakti* movements of the “sixteenth and seventeenth centuries established powerful alternate traditions regarding the status of women, socially and within the family” (217). Both of Dalmia’s essays on the *vārtās* represent important milestones in Puṣṭimārg scholarship. She is one of the few scholars who brings to light hitherto unexplored aspects of Puṣṭimārg devotionism, such as the practice of domestic *sevā* and women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg. In fact, “Women, Duty, and Sanctified Space” represents one of the few works in the English language that has attempted to explore the ways in which women have participated in the sect. However, as the title itself indicates, Dalmia’s study is limited to a textual study of Puṣṭimārgī women’s devotional practices as narrated in the tradition’s hagiographic literature and does not touch upon the subject of contemporary women’s domestic practices.

From an emic perspective, the narratives from the *vārtās* describe events that took place in the lives of actual people. Although one should be cautious in using these hagiographies as sources of “accurate” historical data, the *vārtās* nevertheless help produce a quasi-historical picture of seventeenth century north India and illuminate ideological positions valued by Puṣṭimārgīs. In terms of Puṣṭimārg’s history, Kanṭhmani Śāstrī’s large Hindi compilation, entitled *Kāṃkrolī kā Itihās* (1939), provides historical information concerning the lives and activities of Puṣṭimārg hereditary leaders from the

important Dvārakādhīśjī *havelī* in Kankroli, Rajasthan, including accounts about their relationship with the Mewar royal family. Two excellent English socio-historical studies of the sect include Edwin Allen Richardson’s unpublished doctoral thesis entitled “The Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya, 1640-1760 AD” (1979) and Shandip Saha’s unpublished thesis, “Creating a Community of Grace: A History of the Puṣṭimārg in Northern and Western India” (2004). I draw on both these studies in my first chapter to illustrate Puṣṭimārg’s rise as a courtly religion in western India and to map the important cultural and economic ties that were being forged between Rajasthani royals, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, and Gujarati *baniyā śeṭhs* during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Saha, however, contextualizes this discussion against the backdrop of the troubled Delhi Sultanate era, which he argues promoted the formation of the Puṣṭimārg sect. In the closing chapters of his dissertation, Saha discusses the relationship between Puṣṭimārg and its mercantile followers in the colonial context of the nineteenth century Bombay Presidency, and concludes with an overview of the Mahārāj Libel Case.

In their attempts to construct a social history of Puṣṭimārg, one of the significant drawbacks of the works of both Richardson and Saha is the portrayal of Puṣṭimārg as a sect whose practices are wholly temple-centered. Furthermore, Saha does highlight the role of reformers, like Karsondas Mulji, in the libel case and he also discusses the potential institutional changes in Puṣṭimārg in the aftermath of the case. However, nowhere does Saha discuss the role or status of Puṣṭimārgī women, even though the case was ostensibly about their sexual exploitation. Nor does Saha contextualize the debates surrounding the libel case within the larger middle-class

discourses on gender and domesticity circulating in the late nineteenth century.

Other authors who have focused on the Mahārāj Libel Case include Mehta (1971), Thakkar (1997), Haberman (1993), Shodhan (1995, 1997), Lüt (1995), and Scott (2009). These sources, with the exception of Thakkar and Shodhan, focus mostly on the reformist rhetoric being used throughout the trial to undermine a *bhakti* sect like Puṣṭimārg in comparison to the “ancient” Vedic traditions. Although Scott does touch upon issues of gender construction and sexuality, which are clearly informing the trial, his discussion is brief and also points to the works of Shodhan and Thakkar. Both Shodhan and Thakkar’s studies serve as excellent sources for unpacking the “women’s question” in the libel case. Drawing on the work of Lata Mani, who examines colonial debates on *sati* abolition (1998), Thakkar argues how Puṣṭimārgī women are “neither subjects nor objects but the ground chosen by the leaders of a sect and social reformers to decide what is moral and what is religious practice” (46). Similarly, Shodhan (1997) demonstrates how male reformers involved in the trial were more concerned with regulating and monitoring women’s movements and reconstituting their place to the home. However, none of these lines of inquiry explore the issue of domestic *sevā* and how women’s domestic religious practices may have been affected by the gender, domestic, and religious reform debates of the time.

Finally, Francoise Mallison’s English and French essays on Puṣṭimārg devotional songs (in the *dhol* genre) represent the only examples of western scholarship that explore Puṣṭimārg women’s domestic religious practices in the twentieth century (1986; 1989). Although Mallison does not discuss the practice of domestic *sevā per se*, she does demonstrate how devotional songs in the vernacular languages of Hindi and

Gujarati are popularly sung by Puṣṭimārgī women while performing *sevā* at home or during women’s *satsaṅg* gatherings. She juxtaposes the singing of such songs by women with the tradition of temple music, which has remained the preserve of Puṣṭimārg male hereditary musicians for centuries. I build on Mallison’s work on Puṣṭimārg *dhol* songs in my fourth chapter in an effort to highlight the historical literary activities of *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* – the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs, respectively – many of whom composed these songs. My examination of contemporary women’s performance cultures, however, is grounded in my debate on class production among elite Puṣṭimārg families in Gujarat. For example, many Puṣṭimārg women from these families have begun to take lessons in temple or *havelī* liturgical music (*kīrtan*), calling into question the gendered and spatial exclusivity of the temple *kīrtan* repertoires.

Research Methods

The spatial and social contexts of my study include the Puṣṭimārg urban home as well as the communal spaces and networks created by and between Puṣṭimārg women who perform daily domestic *sevā*. These include, for example, religious-social gatherings (*satsaṅg*) where women come together to discuss Puṣṭimārg theological themes and ritual adornment ideas and recipes, as well as *bhajan maṅḍalīs* (“singing groups”) and temple-song (*kīrtan*) classes. The regional and historical foci of my investigation range from eighteenth century Gujarat and Rajasthan to the present. My focus on contemporary, living Puṣṭimārg is centered on the city of Ahmedabad.

Using an interdisciplinary methodology, the data for this study is drawn from several broad areas. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I piece together a pre-colonial

history of Puṣṭimārg patronage by the *baniyā* communities of Gujarat through examining seventeenth century European travel accounts, as well as an English translation of the eighteenth century Persian text, the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*. I draw on primary sources from the colonial period for my discussions in chapters two and three on *baniyā* upper-class identity formation and the implication of nineteenth century reform movements on the religious activities of Puṣṭimārg women. Finally, chapters four and five draw on Hindi, Gujarati, and Brajbhāṣā textual and manuscript sources, as well as ethnography.²⁰ My work with hereditary Puṣṭimārg leaders like Vagishkumar Gosvāmī and Indira *beṭījī*,²¹ as well as leaders who function as traditional scholars of the sect, such as Shyam Manohar Gosvāmī, has proved invaluable to this project. Vagishkumar Gosvāmī, for example, is the direct descendant in a line of Puṣṭimārg hereditary leaders who have presided over the Dvārakādhīśjī *havelī* in Kankroli, Rajasthan since the *havelī*'s establishment in the late seventeenth century. The *havelī* was patronized by Rajasthan royal families and became a vibrant Puṣṭimārg religious and cultural center; it serves as an important pilgrimage site even today. With the permission of Vagishkumar Gosvāmī, I was able to access the *havelī*'s private library collections where I found devotional works composed by Puṣṭimārg women (lay followers and wives/daughters of hereditary leaders).

In addition to textual and archival work, a methodological approach that I use in this project is ethnography, in the form of participant observation and through

²⁰ Examples of manuscript materials include *Kakko* (B.J. Institute, ms. 1088), *Kṛṣṇa-Ras* (B.J. Institute., ms. 6671), *Gupta-Ras* (B.J. Institute, ms.8511a), *Sevā-Vidhi-Utsav* (B.J. Institute, ms. 2177), *Puṣṭi-Sevā* (B.J. Institute, ms. 1089), *Padsaṃgrah* (Oriental Institute. 144.7357), *Vaiṣṇavnā Vasaṅt Holī Dhol* (Oriental Institute, ms.14359), *Vaiṣṇavnā Sevā Śṛṅgār* (Oriental Institute, ms. 14364).

²¹ *Beṭī*, which literally means “daughter,” is normally suffixed to the names of the daughters of hereditary Puṣṭimārg leaders. As I discuss in my conclusion, Indira *beṭījī* is at the centre of an ever-expanding global community of Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇavs and is a *guru* figure for hundreds of male and female disciples.

conducting “conversational interviews” with close to forty-five participants. I conducted this field work in three-four month periods over the course of four years (2007-2010). As noted above, I have worked with several hereditary leaders from within the tradition, such as Shyam Manohar Gosvāmī in Mumbai, Vagish Gosvāmī and Indira *beṭījī* in Baroda, and Raja *beṭījī* in Ahmedabad. Since my project focuses on the question of women’s participation in the tradition, I have conducted extensive fieldwork with Puṣṭimārg female lay practitioners who perform elaborate devotional rituals in their homes. I also accompanied several women while they attended Puṣṭimārg-related social activities, including discussion/reading groups, singing sessions at a devotee’s home, and *kīrtan* classes. With their permission, I was at times also able to document these activities through audio and video recordings. Most of the women I worked with belong to the wealthy, upper-class families of Ahmedabad. During my interview sessions, although I loosely followed a standardized set of questions, I engaged my interlocutors in conversation, which allowed us to move into spontaneous discussions about their religious activities outside of the home, their social lives, personal lives, and family relationships.

Drawing on the methods of reflexive ethnography, I recognize how my approach, my identity as a woman/researcher/student of Indian origin, and the fact that I am not a follower of the Puṣṭimārg tradition, influenced the women I have worked with and thus shaped this project in specific ways. As Frederick Steier argues, “By recognizing our own role in research, our reciprocators are, seemingly paradoxically, given greater voice,” whereby the research process becomes one in which the researcher and the “reciprocator” engage in the co-constructing of a world (180). It is this “co-

constructed world” of women’s articulatory practices that guides my work. Moreover, as the section on “Domestic Rituals, Women, and the Practice of *Bhakti*” above indicated, this is a study that discusses the socio-religious, ritual, performance, and aesthetic practices of Puṣṭimārg women, including their everyday negotiations with caste, class, and kinship affiliations and structures. This project is, therefore, also informed by South Asian feminist approaches to ethnography.²² In my examination of the social activities and aesthetic choices related to Puṣṭimārg women’s devotional practices and how they are implicated in the process of family status production I build on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of social and symbolic capital. In addition to the authors noted above in sections II (“Domestic Rituals”) and III (“Religious Patronage”), I also draw heavily on the growing body of literature on class in South Asia.²³ By organizing Puṣṭimārg related social events, arranging for private *kīrtan* lessons, and functioning as the primary consumers and displayers of religious commodities in the home, elite Puṣṭimārgī women create – and in some respects, *become* – the cultural or symbolic capital needed to maintain and reproduce family status and respectability (Hancock 1999, 14).

²² My perspectives on women’s articulatory practices and women’s histories resonate with the large body of theoretical work by feminist scholars of South Asia. These include: Chaudhuri (2005); Hancock (2000); Loomba and Lukose (2012); Majumdar (2009); Mohanty (2003); Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, eds. (1991); Powell and Lambert-Hurley, eds. (2006); Rajan (1993); Rege (2006); Sangari and Vaid, eds. (1989); Sarkar (2001); Sinha (2006); Sreenivas (2008); Visweswaran (1994).

²³ Prominent examples of theoretical work on issues of class in South Asia include: Ahmad and Reifeld, eds. (2001); Appadurai, ed. (1986); Assayag and Fuller, eds. (2005); Basu (2004); Birla (2009); Breckenridge, ed. (1995); Brosius, (2010); Caplan (1985); Chatterjee (1993); Chakrabarty (2000); Fernandes (2006); Joshi (2010); Ray and Qayam (2009); Van Wessel (2004).

Form and Structure

In chapter one, “*Baniyās on the Path to Grace*” I trace Puṣṭimārg’s rise as a courtly religion in western India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Using European travel accounts from the seventeenth century I demonstrate how, by the time Puṣṭimārg consolidates itself in parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan, Gujarati *baniyās* already appeared to have been exercising a high social and ritual status. The lavish patronage of a courtly sect like Puṣṭimārg, I suggest, served to further enhance *baniyā* prestige and social respectability. Drawing on a Persian source, Ali Muhammad Khan’s *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* (1761), I chart the religious activities of Puṣṭimārg *baniyās* in Mughal-period Ahmedabad. Finally, the theme of Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* patronage is extended to the nineteenth century context of the Bombay Presidency through the writings of the Scottish East India Company officer, Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1821-1865) and his *Rās Mala* ([1878]1973). Although in many of these sources we are not provided with explicit references to domestic *sevā* practices, it is clear that affluent *baniyās* perpetuated their elite status through patterns of religious giving.

Chapter two investigates the production of elite Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* identities through the prism of colonial modernity. Class as a modern category for designating social status and respectability is one of the important developments of the colonial period. One of the aims of this chapter is to demonstrate how the wealthy *baniyā śeṭhs* of the Bombay Presidency were constitutive of the upper-classes and *not* the middle-classes – those who were wholly dependent on the new colonial economy. Using their credit networks and commercial services, *baniyās* facilitated the expansion of the British Rāj in western India. *Śeṭhs* also participated in the Anglo-Indian judicial system, and oversaw

and provided the capital for municipal affairs and urban development projects. However, despite their economic and administrative collaboration with the British, upper-class Gujarati *baniyās* did not show interest in one of the most important aspects of colonial modernity, namely English education. As the chapter illustrates, the upper-classes and the educated-classes constituted two entirely different social groups in the Bombay Presidency.

Chapter three explores how, by the middle of the nineteenth century, members of the English educated middle-classes participated in reformist campaigns against the Gujarati *baniyā* community. Reforms criticized the affluent lifestyles of *śeṭhs* as well as their apathy towards western education (and thus, social progress). However, as the infamous Mahārāj Libel Case of 1862 demonstrated, what disturbed social and religious reformers most, was the *baniyā* community's affiliation with Puṣṭimārg. The libel case, which ostensibly centered on the sexual exploitation of Puṣṭimārg women, provided an opportunity for reformers like Karsondas Mulji to undermine the legitimacy and authenticity of Puṣṭimārg as a sectarian tradition, as well as question the authority of Gosvāmīs as religious leaders. More importantly, however, this chapter maps the larger gender- and religion-based reform discourses of the nineteenth century that clearly informed the ambitions and ideological agendas of reformers like Mulji and his supporters. The social and religious activities of Puṣṭimārg women became sites upon which middle-class moralities were mapped and debated. The connections between woman, home, and respectability being forged through these debates reconstituted Puṣṭimārg women's religious practices to the home, thus casting them as the primary producers and performers of elite Puṣṭimārgī identities.

Historical texts and reformist movements (demonstrated by the libel case) indicate Puṣṭimārg women's active involvement in Puṣṭimārg. However, in order to appreciate the modes of female participation in Puṣṭimārg's social history, chapter four turns to traditional sources which help illustrate their historical presence and roles in the sect. These sources include the hagiographical literature, specifically the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā*, as well as devotional songs composed by Puṣṭimārg women. The *vārtās* provide us with a sense of how the sect itself perceived of lay women's social positions and religious roles in Puṣṭimārg. While the devotional songs composed by women in the popular Gujarati performance genres of *dhol* and *garbā* not only demonstrate a significant way in which women perpetuated the living traditions of Puṣṭimārg but they also serve as an important counterpoint to the temple traditions of *havelī kīrtan* music.

The final chapter in this thesis, "From *Havelī* to Home" focuses on the intersections between modes of women's participation in Puṣṭimārg, domestic religious practices, and class formation in contemporary Puṣṭimārg. By bringing together the themes covered in earlier chapters with a discussion on twentieth century nationalist ideologies, consumption practices, and class politics I demonstrate how the modern Puṣṭimārg home is recast as the cultural site for both class and sectarian identity formation. The data for this chapter is drawn primarily from the field work I have conducted with female lay practitioners in the city of Ahmedabad. My ethnography consists of participant observation, audio and video recordings, and conversational interviews I conducted with close to forty-five participants. The participants of my study consisted of mostly middle-aged women belonging to wealthy business families, as well

as hereditary Puṣṭimārg leaders and their *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs*. A majority of the women I worked with are connected to one another through overlapping social networks or by marriage. Therefore, I begin my discussion of the relationship between Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā* and elite sectarian identity formation by first demonstrating how the practice of *sevā* was introduced to many women as a result of their marriage into Puṣṭimārgī families.

Many of the women I worked with have begun taking lessons in *havelī kīrtan* singing, popularly referred to as *havelī saṅgīt*. As I demonstrate in this chapter, upper-class women are continuing to perpetuate elite Puṣṭimārg identities by making claims to a more canonical and “classical” Puṣṭimārg performance genre. Furthermore, in many of the homes of these women, class and status are signified by the characteristic markers of privilege, such as large bungalows, the presence of domestic labour, and signs of an available disposable income. However, material expressions of their sectarian identities – which I interpret as cultural and symbolic capital – are also implicated in the processes of class production. These include Puṣṭimārg women’s increased commodified styles of domestic worship, their consumption and display of expensive Puṣṭimārg religious commodities, and the time and space allotted to the performance of domestic *sevā*.

Conclusion

This project examines how the religious patronage of Puṣṭimārg facilitates the reproduction and display of family status. To date, most studies of Puṣṭimārg, even those that address the relationship between Puṣṭimārg patronage and the production of prestige, have focused exclusively on temple practice. This work constitutes the first English

language study to explore Puṣṭimārg domestic ritual and women's religious practices in the home. It thus extends current scholarship on Puṣṭimārg scholarship by highlighting important and hitherto neglected aspects of the sect. Furthermore, since Puṣṭimārg women's religious activities are examined outside the well-rehearsed models of auspiciousness and *sumaṅgalī* status, this study marks an important contribution to the study of gender and Hinduism more broadly.

There are three major themes that weave through this thesis: 1) the relationship between class-inflected modernities and Puṣṭimārg; 2) the perpetuation of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities through material culture (such as ritual substances donated for use in *havelī sevā*, the ritual accoutrements used in domestic *sevā*, the religious commodities displayed in the home, and so on); and 3) women's roles in both these processes. As I discuss throughout this work, colonial modernity, gender and domestic reform, and nationalist ideologies have reconstituted the home and women's domestic activities as sites of cultural and status production. Puṣṭimārg women's religious activities, which are increasingly being informed by changes in consumption styles and aesthetic tastes, have cast the Puṣṭimārg home as the modern site of religious patronage. As the first study to explore women's domestic religious practices and class production in Puṣṭimārg, this project raises more questions than it seeks to answer. Each theme explored in this dissertation – religious reform and Puṣṭimārg, the historical roles of women in the sect, Puṣṭimārg domestic rituals, and Puṣṭimārg performance cultures – can undoubtedly be subjects of further academic inquiry.

CHAPTER 1

***Baniyās* on the Path to Grace: Puṣṭimārg and the Production of Prestige Amongst the Mercantile Communities of Gujarat, 1670-1860**

From the time Puṣṭimārg arrived in Gujarat and Rajasthan in the mid-seventeenth century it enjoyed the support and patronage of political and royal nobilities. As Puṣṭimārg grew into a courtly religion, the sect's religious leaders – the Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs – also became powerful and wealthy land-owners (*jāgidārs*). At the same time, the proselytizing and entrepreneurial efforts of Gosvāmīs attracted the wealthy mercantile communities of western India, which included the Gujarati *baniyās* and *bhāṭiyās*.²⁴ Both members of the political nobility and Puṣṭimārg leadership profited from their deepening ties with these Gujarati merchant elites.

²⁴ In my work, I use the categories of *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* to denote specific *jātīs*, or sub-castes, within the larger commercial caste or *vaiśya varṇa*. There are numerous other commercial sub-castes in Gujarat, such as the *bhansālīs*, *kāpols*, and *luhānās*. Traditional as well as scholarly sources sometimes use “*baniyā*” interchangeably with “*vaiśya*” to characterize all these commercial castes more generally. These terms normally describe occupations, and their meanings change in different contexts. For example, the word *baniyā* stems from “*vāṇik*,” “*vāṇija*,” and “*vāṇi*,” and in Maharashtra the term “*vāṇi*” was used to describe a person who was a trader-cum-userer, whereas European travelers would use the term “*banyan*” to refer to any trader in general. Depending on the context or source, one finds the term *baniyā* denoting merchants and business men from the Hindu Brahmin caste, as well as from Jain, Muslim, and Parsi communities (David Hardiman 1996, 62). I use the term “*baniyā*” to refer to Hindu commercial castes more broadly, and though they are separate sub-castes, I will only distinguish “*baniyā*” from other sub-castes such as “*bhāṭiyā*” when necessary. Though I am using the category in its most generalized sense, it is important to note that within these commercial communities distinctions are made between village grain dealers (also called *baniyā*), the local money dealer (*śarraḥ*), the traveling trader, and the great merchant or guild of the city (*māhājan*) (Bayly 1983, 371). Furthermore, many of these sub-castes which sometimes become subsumed under the general category of *baniyā* do not necessarily identify themselves as such. *Bhāṭiyās*, for example, who hail from the regions of Sind, Kutch, and Saurashtra instead claim Rājput or *ksatriya* ancestry (Markovits 2008, 194; Simpson, 2008). Another important point of difference between *bhāṭiyās* and *baniyās* is the caste taboo placed on foreign travel by the latter. Finally, since my project focuses on Puṣṭimārg families in Ahmedabad, I am using the term “*baniyā*” in a localized sense to refer to the Hindu commercial communities of central Gujarat. I am consciously distinguishing “*baniyā*” from “*mārvārīs/mārvāḍīs*,” the term used to refer to the commercial castes of Rajasthan. For more on the activities of *mārvārīs* see Timberg (1978) and Birla (2009); for their pan-national activities and on the politics of *mārvāri* community formation in Calcutta, see Hardgrove (2004).

In this chapter, I trace the development of *baniyā* patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India. I demonstrate how the high caste and social status exercised by Gujarati *baniyās* facilitated the community's adoption of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity. Furthermore, for a community in which the display and maintenance of trust-worthiness and honor (*ābrū*) is of social and economic value, the lavish patronage of an exalted sect such as Puṣṭimārg served to further enhance *baniyā* prestige and respectability.

Courtly Contexts: The Royal Patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India

Beginning with Vallabha and his earliest descendents, the Puṣṭimārg tradition received considerable patronage from members of north and western India's political and royal nobility and wealthy mercantile communities. Puṣṭimārg historian, Shandip Saha, draws on the sect's hagiographical (*vārtā*) literature, traditional sources on Vallabha's pilgrimage tours (*Caurāsī Bhaṭhak Caritra*), as well as Vallabha's biography (*Śrī Mahāprabhujī kī Nijvārta*), to demonstrate how Vallabha focused most of his proselytizing efforts in the Malwa region of central India and in the Kathiawad peninsula of Gujarat (Saha 2007, 304). In Gujarat, Vallabha drew followers from the agrarian communities like the *kuṇbīs* and *pātidārs* and he also began to attract members from the prominent and wealthy Hindu mercantile communities such as the *luhāṇās*, *bhāṭiyās*, and *baniyās*.

Vallabha's second son and successor, Viṭṭhalanātha, furthered Vallabha's proselytizing activities. He is also credited with institutionalizing the *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa in Puṣṭimārg *havelīs*, as well as guaranteeing the continued worship of the sect's nine Kṛṣṇa images (*svarūps*) by distributing them among his seven sons. Like Vallabha,

Viṭṭhalanātha is said to have embarked on a series of “fund-raising” tours throughout Gujarat between 1543 and 1582, in which he continued to initiate *baniyās* and members from farming and agricultural communities in cities like Surat, Cambay, Godhra, and Ahmedabad (Saha 2004, 121). However, unlike Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha actively sought the support and patronage of the ruling political elite. Drawing once again from Puṣṭimārg *vārtā* literature (*Bhāvsindhi kī vārtā*), Saha indicates how in 1562 Viṭṭhalanātha secured the patronage of the Hindu queen, Rānī Durgāvātī, of the Gondwana region in central India (122). Furthermore, and though it is not historically verifiable whether or not or even how Viṭṭhalanātha had direct connections with the Mughal court, one can find a grant in Emperor Akbar’s name exempting Viṭṭhalanātha and his descendents from paying taxes on the land in and around the area of Gokul and Govardhan.²⁵

Viṭṭhalanātha’s descendents continued to live in the Braj region until the political instability precipitated by the Jāṭ Rebellion in the late seventeenth century prompted many members of the Puṣṭimārg leadership to migrate into parts of Rajasthan, such as Jaipur, Bundi, Bikaner, and Mewar (Saha 2008, 304). The Mewar rulers, in particular *mahārāṇa* Rāj Siṃh (r. 1653-80), offered the Puṣṭimārg continued support and military protection in Rajasthan.²⁶ The assurance of such security facilitated the move of

²⁵ This specific grant is issued in the year 1593. For a detailed examination of all the land grants issued to the Puṣṭimārg Mahārājs by the Mughals see Krishnalal M. Jhaveri, *Imperial Farmans* (1928). In the text, Jhaveri provides English, Hindi, and Gujarati translations of the *farmāns*.

²⁶ According to Saha, who bases his conclusions on Kanthmani Sastri’s traditional historical treatise, *Kāṃkaroli kī Itihās* (1939), Rājput patronage of Puṣṭimārg only began in the mid-seventeenth century when Jagat Siṃh I (r. 1628-52) of Mewar was initiated by Giridhar Mahārāj, the leader of the third house, during a pilgrimage tour in Gokul. This, in part, explains why his son, Rāj Siṃh, would later compete with various Rājput kingdoms for the honor of securing Puṣṭimārg’s base in Mewar, Rajasthan (2008, 309-311).

the image of Śrīnāthjī in 1672 when it was installed in its new *havelī* in the town of Sinhad, which was then renamed Nathdwara.

By 1676, the Mewar kingdom, the oldest and most prestigious among the Rājput states, became the chief patrons of Puṣṭimārg in Rajasthan when its rulers also built a *havelī* for the third house in the town of Kankroli. Since members of the Mewar royal family, beginning with Jagat Siṃh I (r. 1628-52), were already followers of the third house, the Mewar *mahārāṇa* declared the Puṣṭimārg sect as the personal religion of the *darbār*. The Kankroli Gosvāmīs began to serve as the spiritual preceptors of the royal family, and as Saha demonstrates, the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs eventually became a “permanent fixture in the court life of the Mewar *mahārājas* by presiding over major events such as the coronation and sacred thread ceremonies of the Mewar princes” (2004, 180-181).

In his study on Mughal and Rājput patronage of Puṣṭimārg, Edwin Richardson demonstrates how the Mewar kingdom not only supported Puṣṭimārg but also encouraged the sect to become increasingly autonomous by allowing its Gosvāmīs to own and control numerous villages and grazing lands (1979).²⁷ The rulers of Jaipur, Kota, Bikaner, and Jodhpur also granted tax free land to the Gosvāmīs of Nathdwara and Kankroli and held Puṣṭimārg as the religion of the court. By 1809 and 1838, the Gosvāmīs of Nathdwara and Kankroli, respectively became first-ranking *jāgirdārs* or land-owners. They managed the administrative and judicial issues related to their estates, accrued taxes from their lands, collected duty-fees on goods produced in the temple bazaars, exacted fees from

²⁷ By the nineteenth century, the Gosvāmī of Kankroli controlled twenty-one villages in and around the area of Mewar, and the Gosvāmī of Nathdwara controlled close to thirty villages (Richardson 1979, 74-76).

pilgrims as they entered the city walls, and attended and presided over special occasions in the royal *darbārs* (Saha 2004, 185-187). The Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were not only the religious leaders of the community, as a result of their entrepreneurial efforts, by the nineteenth century they had also refashioned themselves as members of the Rājput nobility.

The growing prestige of Puṣṭimārg as a courtly religion was also reflected in Rajasthani visual and artistic cultures. The painting traditions of Mewar, Nathdwara, Kisangarh, and Kota illustrate how Śrīnāthjī himself – following a trajectory similar to his primary caretakers – was also being re-imagined as a Rājput prince. Although both Saha and Richardson indicate that Kisangarh patronage of Puṣṭimārg began with *mahārāṇa* Sāvant Siṃh (r. 1748-1757), according to Brajraj Singh, the contemporary descendent of the Kisangarh royal family, Puṣṭimārg was embraced as the court’s religion much earlier with the conversion of *mahārāṇa* Rūp Siṃh (r. 1643-1658).²⁸ *Mahārāṇa* Sāvant Siṃh is perhaps best known for his devotional poetry to Kṛṣṇa under the pen-name Nāgirdās, and for his love of the Kisangarh courtesan Baṇiṭhaṇī. Nāgirdās’ love poetry became an important source of inspiration for the unique Kisangarh style of painting for which the town is known. In these paintings, commissioned by subsequent Kisangarh *mahārāṇas*, Kṛṣṇa (in his local manifestation as Kalyānrāy), is depicted as a young prince enthroned in his palace, giving *darśan* to Kisangarh kings and being surrounded by royal attendants.²⁹ As Edwin Richardson notes, in this new “artistic renaissance,” Śrīnāthjī was depicted “not in the rustic company of Brajvasis but among

²⁸ Saha (2004, 181); Richardson (1979, 98); personal communication with Brajraj Singh in Kisangarh, Rajasthan, November 2nd, 2008.

²⁹ Richardson (1979, 98-110). For more on Rajasthani and Kishangarh painting styles see Chakraverty (2005); Dehejia (2009) Lyons (2004); Topsfield (2000; 2001).

the nobility in the palaces” (90). In Kota, a similar theme was also developing. *Mahārāṇa* Bhīm Siṃh I (r. 1720-23) took initiation into Puṣṭimārg and established Kṛṣṇa in his form of Brajnāthjī as Kota’s tutelary deity. Paintings from Kota depict Brajnāthjī as a royal ruler presiding over his court, and depict Bhīm Siṃh as a *dīvān* or minister attending to the true king of Kota, Kṛṣṇa. Bhīm Siṃh would eventually build a temple to Brajnāthjī within the palace complex itself, effectively conflating “spaces of Brajnāthjī’s residence with those of royal power” (Taylor, 60-61).

Patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India enabled the reproduction and legitimization of Rājput kingship. As Nicholas Dirks argues, “one of the fundamental requirements of Indian kingship was that the king be a munificent provider of fertile lands for Brahmans..., [and] for temples which were the centers of pūja worship and festival occasions” (1979, 44). In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the Rājput king’s munificence was displayed through land grants made to Puṣṭimārg Brahmin Gosvāmīs, financing the construction of *havelīs*, providing assurance of military protection to these religious institutions, and by patronizing and sometimes even producing (as in the case of *mahārāṇa* Sāvant Siṃh) devotional poetry. In return, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs presided over ceremonial and religious events at the kings’ *darbārs*. The presence of Puṣṭimārg within a particular kingdom also brought reputability and lent credence to that state since large *havelīs* like the ones in Nathdwara and Kankroli required substantial financial subsistence from its patrons to operate and to carry out its daily liturgical activities. That is to say,

Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were attracted to only those kingdoms which were politically stable, could guarantee military protection, and which provided continual patronage.³⁰

A dialectical relationship existed between the Rājput kingdom and Puṣṭimārg, each reinforcing and legitimizing the other. For example, Bhīm Siṃh I, the first Kota king to become initiated in Puṣṭimārg, began his kingship in the same year that Aurangzeb died (1707) and when Mughal reign was becoming increasingly destabilized. Bhīm Siṃh wanted to take advantage of this moment of Mughal weakness to “transform Kota from a petty principality of minor consequence to a regional power” by patronizing Puṣṭimārg (Norbert Peabody 1991, 734). In Mewar, Rāj Siṃh encouraged Puṣṭimārg Mahārājs to settle in the region when he too was in the process of economically and culturally reconstructing the state after years of warfare with the Mughals (Saha 2007, 311). The kingdoms of Kota and Mewar vied for the honor of permanently housing Puṣṭimārg at moments of state building and expansion. Finally, another important reason for the Rājput nobility to want to attract and secure the presence of Puṣṭimārg in their region at moments of cultural, political, and economical expansion is because they, like Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, participated in profitable relationships with some of the wealthiest followers of Puṣṭimārg, namely the Gujarati Hindu *baniyās* or mercantile communities.

³⁰ In his travel accounts through Rajasthan the British political agent, Colonel James Tod, writes of his attendance at an important Puṣṭimārg festival, which took place in Nathdwara in 1822. All the different *svarūps* associated with the seven houses had congregated in Nathdwara for the event. Tod explains how the Rājput rulers asked his help to make sure the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs returned to the same capitals from which they came, together with their *svarūps*, for the Rājput rulers “dreaded lest bribery might entice the priests to fix them elsewhere, which would have involved their [the kings’] loss of sanctity, dignity, and prosperity” (Tod 436n2).

Mercantile Munificence: *Baniyā* Patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India

With the establishment of Nathdwara as the sect's cultic centre, the Śrīnāthjī *havelī* and other subsidiary Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* affiliated with the seven houses received sustained patronage from both the Rajasthani aristocracy and from the affluent merchant communities of western India. Prior to Puṣṭimārg's move to Nathdwara, *baniyā* communities were already key patrons of Puṣṭimārg in Braj. However, in western India the success of Puṣṭimārg can be significantly attributed to the ties forged between members of the mercantile community, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, and Rājput *mahārāṇas*.

As noted above, during their proselytizing tours across north and western India, both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha drew converts from a range of caste groups such as *bhūmihār* Brahmins, Rājputs, as well as from low-caste farming communities like the *gujars*, *kurmīs*, *kuṇbīs* and *pāṭidārs* (Saha 2007, 306).³¹ However, second to Rājput *mahārāṇas*, the most influential patrons sought out by Viṭṭhalanātha in western India were members from the affluent commercial castes, the Gujarati Hindu *baniyās*. Unlike the ruling political nobility who exercised authority through their control of land, *baniyā* communities controlled the flow of capital and the credit structure. Ashin Das Gupta, in his study of Surat merchants during the eighteenth century, aptly describes *baniyās*' ubiquitous presence and involvement in the money market as follows: "In short wherever

³¹ As David Pocock illustrates in his work, *Mind, Body, and Wealth: A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village* (1973), under the Mughal government some *kuṇbī* families assumed the title *pāṭidār* ("land-owner") because they were granted the right to dispense with "middle-men" when paying their land tax. As this new caste title was becoming more popular for denoting the wealthy and prestigious members of the *kuṇbī* community, more and more *kuṇbīs* started to appropriate the name *pāṭidār*. In 1931, the caste title was officially changed to *pāṭidār* (5-6). The change in name ostensibly marked an improved caste designation and status. However, as Pocock argues, even after the change in caste name a distinction is still retained between *pāṭidār* and *kuṇbī* by members of these communities: "A man may be a Patidar in his own eyes and in the eyes of his affines and still be considered a Kanbi by [an] other Patidar" (1972, 52).

there was an economic transaction in the city, you would very likely find a broker to smooth your way and take his cut” (84-85 qtd in M.N. Pearson, 457).

As traders, brokers, bankers, and currency dealers and exchangers (*śaroffs*), many *baniyās* maintained an itinerant lifestyle and were therefore able to cultivate expansive networks of social and political connections across large regions, including those beyond India.³² From the time when the rulers of Rajasthan and Gujarat were forced to accept the suzerainty of Mughal emperors, well known *baniyās* provided large loans to Rājput *mahārāṇas*, occupied important political positions, held some control over state finances and revenue collection, and even served as ration suppliers and paymasters of the states’ armies (Markovits 2008; Hardiman 22-25). Their ties with Rājputs also facilitated many *baniyās* to form connections with Mughal officials and rulers, which perhaps explains why many Hindu merchants were able to continue to expand their networks under the Mughal regime. In Rajasthan, many land-owners or *jāgirdārs* also appointed merchants and usurers to collect their land-tax revenue more efficiently by using their own local connections (Hardiman 23-25). As *jāgirdārs* themselves, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs may have also relied on influential and trustworthy *baniyās* to facilitate their tax-revenue collection. Whether or not such a “working” relationship existed between Puṣṭimārg leaders and *baniyās*, socio-political, economic, and cultural ties were indeed being fostered between the political nobility, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, and influential merchants and bankers. On the one hand, as Saha argues, “Puṣṭimārg’s deepening ties with political elites offered merchants greater opportunities to increase their social

³² During the expansion of the Maritime Gujarat overseas trade in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, many business communities like the *bhāṭiyās* expanded their trading networks to regions outside of India, like Zanzibar, Muscat, China, and Japan – but they were forbidden to journey to Europe and America due to caste restrictions (Shodhan 2001, 9).

prestige through their continued patronage of the *mahārājas*” (2007, 312). On the other hand, direct connections with Rājapūts and the granting of loans and gifts to these rulers also endowed *baniyās* with considerable respectability and influence. Thus, both political rulers and Puṣṭimārg religious leaders were dependent on the support and patronage of wealthy merchants, whose trustworthiness, honor, or prestige (*ijjat*, *ābrū*) were in turn informed by patterns of religious and political gift giving.³³

There are also several instances where we see the influence of a wealthy Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* approach that of political nobility in the context of religious patronage. In his study of Puṣṭimārg patronage by the kings of Kota, Norbert Peabody illustrates how in 1720 Bhīm Siṃh was defeated and killed by Nizam-ul-Mulk, a feudatory of the Mughal emperor, who was based in Hyderabad. Bhīm Siṃh was known to have the *svarūp* of Brijnāthjī accompany him and his troops on an elephant in every battle. When Bhīm Siṃh was killed, the elephant carrying the palladium was also captured by Nizam-ul-Mulk and brought back to Hyderabad. In an effort to preserve the “potency” of Kota’s tutelary deity, a Hindu merchant in Hyderabad solicited the image from Nizam-ul-Mulk, built a *havelī*, and spent hundreds of thousands of rupees to continue the lavish *sevā* of the Puṣṭimārg deity, until it was returned to Kota five years later (1991, 737). Due to his wealth and social influence the *baniyā* was essentially able to stand in for the Kota king and continue the worship of Brijnāthjī. Another example of mercantile munificence is brought to us by Colonel James Tod’s accounts of Rajasthan. In his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Tod describes his attendance at an important Puṣṭimārg festival

³³ Words like *mān*, *ijjat*, and *ābrū* were used by members of the *baniyā* community to refer to social distinctions like “honor,” “prestige,” or “reputation.” However, the most significant of these terms was *ābrū*, which referred to both a merchant’s or merchant firm’s economic credit and reputation (Haynes 1991, 56).

(*aṅṅakūṭ*) taking place in Nathdwara in 1822. He writes how, eighty years earlier, during the same festival:

Rana Ursi presented to the god a *tora*, or massive golden anklet-chain set with emeralds; Beejy Sing a diamond necklace worth twenty-five thousand rupees; other princes according to their means. They were followed by an old woman of Surat, with infirm step and shaking head, who ... placed at its feet a bill of exchange for seventy thousand rupees. The mighty were humbled ... Such gifts, and to a yet greater amount, are, or were, by no means uncommon from the sons of commerce... (436)

This description by Tod of donation activities by kings and a wealthy *baniyā* woman not only illustrates how Rājput kings and affluent Hindu merchants were among the most important patrons of Puṣṭimārg, but that kings could be “humbled” by the status of these merchants. Also it is noteworthy that a woman is making such a generous donation, suggesting that Puṣṭimārg lay women were also actively involved in forms of religious giving. This is a theme we will return to later in our discussion on Puṣṭimārg lay women’s religious roles in Puṣṭimārg.

As the Mughal empire was becoming decentralized and weak in the eighteenth century, the political nobility of western India increasingly turned to the affluent commercial castes for support. Their mutual ties to Puṣṭimārg facilitated the formation of a “king-merchant” alliance in which income from trade, as well as pilgrimage traffic generated by Gujarati mercantile followers, provided continued financial sustenance to kings (Peabody 1991, 751; Saha 2004, 177). In addition to these political elites, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were also dependent on the *baniyā* community for financial support. For example, Gosvāmīs derived a considerable amount of money from the duties they

would extract on goods produced in the market place – especially those goods produced by their Gujarati devotees.

Before many of the merchants in Gujarat migrated to Bombay – the commercial-industrial-administrative centre of the British Rāj in western India – cities like Surat and Ahmedabad were home to affluent *baniyā* communities who played an important role in both the indigenous commercial economy and international trade. Surat linked several important trade routes between its port and the manufacturing centres of Bharuch, Cambay, and Ahmedabad (Haynes 1991, 35-37). In such large towns and cities, many *baniyā* sub-castes would be organized around occupational guild-like regional bodies known as *mahājans*.³⁴ These *mahājans* were responsible for standardizing the rules for conducting business by the *baniyās* (such as establishing prices as well as wages for artisans), they exercised religious functions such as building temples and rest-houses (*dharmśālās*), enforced caste rules of marriage and customary practices, and would help resolve any conflicts among members within the community. In short, as Douglas Haynes argues, *mahājans* were concerned most with managing any threats to the *baniyā* community's social honor and economic credit, its *ābrū*. *Mahājans* were “critical arenas in which authority was generated and perpetuated ... [and] like other high-caste institutions, [they] were enmeshed in the politics of reputation” (1991, 60-61). If members of the community did not comply with the decisions made by their *mahājan*,

³⁴ Caste and occupational guilds such as these are known to have existed in Gujarat for at least the last eight centuries (Haynes 1991, 60). Dwijendra Tripathi and Makrand Mehta also note how *mahājans* did not follow the same pattern of organization in all cities. For example, unlike Surat, Ahmedabad did not have one city wide organization. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the city had approximately fifty-three *mahājan*-like institutions. Ahmedabad instead had a *nagarśeṭh*, a position which developed in the seventeenth century and was adopted by other urban centers much later. The *nagarśeṭh* coordinated between the heads of *mahājans* and the state, and under the leadership of the *nagarśeṭh*, the Ahmedabad *mahājans* sometimes worked together to protect their business interests (159-160).

they faced the threat of expulsion from the guild and therefore also faced the possibility of being ex-communicated from their caste as well (63).

In his study of the merchant communities of Surat, Haynes notes how most guilds like the large *Samast Vanik Mahajan* (the *mahājan* of all the Hindu *baniyās* in Surat) would link themselves to a well known religious institution. The *Samast Vanik Mahajan*, for example, was actively involved with all the devotional activities and with the Gosvāmīs of Surat’s Bālkr̥ṣṇalālī *havelī*, popularly known as “Moṭā *mandīr*.”³⁵ *Mahājans* such as these would normally collect a cess or tax, called *lāgo*, on the trade of their *baniyā* members and then donate these funds to the various *havelīs*. In Gujarat, this form of patronage constituted a major source of income for the *havelīs* and their Gosvāmīs. This pattern of patronage also continued in colonial Bombay where, by the mid-nineteenth century, five to six Mahārājs had already established themselves. The various Vaiṣṇav *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities that migrated to Bombay from Gujarat during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries signed an agreement with the Bombay Gosvāmīs in 1823 to donate all tax proceeds extracted from every item or commodity of trade and sale (Shodhan 2001, 10). These ranged from quotidian items such as spices, cotton, cloth, opium, and bills of exchange, to luxury goods like gold and silver, pearls and jewels (Mulji 1865, 146).

In addition to such clear financial support of the Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* and their Gosvāmīs, *mahājan* guilds also helped to organize feasts to honor Gosvāmīs on special occasions, such as religious holidays or for a Gosvāmī’s marriage and sacred-thread

³⁵ Though there have been disputes in the early twentieth century among the descendents of Viṭṭhalanātha’s sixth son over matters of succession, the Gosvāmīs of the Bālkr̥ṣṇajī *havelī* claim leadership of this Sixth House in Surat.

ceremonies. On these occasions, many *baniyā* families even competed for the honor to host the *mahājan*'s festivities. The *mahājan* made their decision based on the proposed arrangements put forth by the applicant and – perhaps more importantly – they considered the “moral character” or *ābrū* of the potential sponsor (Haynes 1991, 65). Cultivating a relationship of trust and respect with the local *mahājan* was therefore essential for *baniyā* families to maintain and produce their own family's *ābrū*. As Haynes explains: “Only with this necessary *collective* base of reputation acquired through participation in the *mahājan*'s affairs could the merchant family firm cultivate its own *individual* prestige and credit in the community through such actions as temple donations and prestigious marriages” (63).

The production and preservation of family prestige and honor or *ābrū* through patterns of religious patronage is an important aspect for understanding how merchant communities are involved with Puṣṭimārg. It relates to the formation of what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) classifies as “cultural” or “social” capital, a theme I will return to shortly. However, it might be helpful to now pause and discuss some additional reasons as to why *baniyā* families were attracted to Puṣṭimārg and why they attracted the attention of Puṣṭimārg Gosvamīs, who were actively seeking new patrons.

***Baniyās* Becoming Puṣṭi**

By the time Vallabha travelled to western India and began attracting followers, places like Rajasthan and Gujarat were already a stronghold for Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇav traditions. Francoise Mallison (1983), in her essay on the development of early Kṛṣṇaism in Gujarat investigates the presence of Vaiṣṇav traditions prior to the rise of a

sectarian tradition like Puṣṭimārg. Mallison demonstrates how Vaiṣṇavism in the form of worship to Viṣṇu-Trivikrama was quite popular in Gujarat in the seventh and eighth centuries.³⁶ Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* flourishes in the fifteenth century when we find Gujarati translations of Sanskrit anthologies dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, such as the *Bālagopālastuti*, the *Gītāgovinda*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* being produced (245). This is also the period during which Narasiṃha Mehtā (ca. 1414-1480 CE), popularly considered the *ādikavi* or “first poet” of the Gujarati language, lived and composed his devotional lyrics to Kṛṣṇa and Śiva.³⁷ Thus, by the time Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha arrived, the Kṛṣṇaite culture of Gujarat was already flourishing. As Mallison argues, “Vallabha and Viṭṭhala did not simply win Gujarat over to their faith; it would be more correct to say that the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* of Gujarat absorbed and inspired it” (1994, 60). However, it was only with the arrival of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha and the particular *bhakti* ethos they presented that this Gujarati “cult of Kṛṣṇa” became crystallized and eventually institutionalized into an orthodox sectarian tradition or *sampradāy*.³⁸

³⁶ Other than areas where Puṣṭimārg and Svāmīnārāyaṇ temples are situated, the most important places of Kṛṣṇa worship in Gujarat are: Dwarka, Dakor, Shamlalji (near Bhiloda), and Tulshishyam (Janagadh district). The main image in all four pilgrimage centers is the form of Viṣṇu as Trivikrama. Here “Trivikrama” represents one of the possible twenty four ways in which Viṣṇu can be shown holding his four insignia (lotus, mace, disc, and conch), and does not refer to Viṣṇu’s *avatār* as Trivikrama-Vāmana (Mallison 1994, 54; 1983, 246).

³⁷ Though a large majority of the poems written by Narasiṃha Mehtā are oriented around Kṛṣṇa and Śiva in their *saguna* (“with-form,” “immanent”) aspects, Narasiṃha Mehtā also composed poetry in the *nirguna* (“transcendent”) *bhakti* genre. Charlotte Vaudeville argues that this eclectic style is representative of the “ecumenical *bhakti*” that prevailed in parts of north and western India by the fifteenth century (qtd. in Neelima Shukla-Bhatt 2003, 13).

³⁸ Another Vaiṣṇav sectarian tradition that appears to have gained popularity in Gujarat during the eighteenth century is the south Indian Śrīvaiṣṇav *sampradāy* founded by Rāmānuja (1017-1137). Rāmānuja unified Vaiṣṇav theology with non-dual (Advaitā) doctrines, and established the philosophical school of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta or “qualified non-dualism.” Śrīvaiṣṇavism places importance on *bhakti* and self-surrender (*prāpatti*) to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇ. Soon after Rāmānuja’s death, a schism emerged over the centrality of the Tamil hymns composed by the Āḷvārs, the nature of the self (*ātman*), and the role of Śrī-Lakṣmī. The

I suggest that Gujarati *baniyās* may have embraced Puṣṭimārg – a tradition which places a heavy emphasis on ritual purity – because of their already high social and ritual status. We can gain some insight into the religious lifestyles of Gujarati *baniyās* during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in the writings of European travelers who visited the bustling commercial centres of Ahmedabad, Surat, and Cambay in their tours across south Asia. In his study of Gujarati merchants and their Indian Ocean networks, Murari Kumar Jha notes how, by the seventeenth century, “the transoceanic movement of people, goods, and ideas made Gujarati port society truly cosmopolitan” (28). Other than the well-established Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Parsi commercial groups residing in Gujarat, the port cities of Ahmedabad and Surat attracted Arab, Turkish, Persian, Egyptian, and Armenian merchant communities as well. It was therefore inevitable for European travelers to also pass through these major cosmopolitan centres, especially Ahmedabad, which was the capital of Gujarat.³⁹

tradition split into two communities – the “northern” Vāṭakalais and the “southern” Teṅkalais. Institutionally, each community consolidated around temples, a lineage of teachers/leaders (*ācāryas*), and centres of learning known as *maṭhs*, with which *ācāryas* were normally associated. Although the dates are not known, according to Haripriya Rangarajan, Śrīvaiṣṇavism found its way to Gujarat with the establishment of the Totādari *maṭh* and the Rāmānujakot at Dwarka. The twenty-fifth leader of the Teṅkalai Vānamāmalai *maṭh* – Chinna Kaliyan Rāmānujan Svāmi – was responsible for doing this (1996, 31-32). Individual *ācāryas* from Tamilnadu and Karnataka also began arriving in Gujarat towards the end of the seventeenth century. With the influence of the Totādari *maṭh* in Dwarka, numerous Śrīvaiṣṇav temples were constructed across Gujarat; by the beginning of the nineteenth century nearly thirty had been established, which were dedicated to forms of Viṣṇu, namely Bālājī, Venkateśvara, and Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇ (36-37). It is important to note that Sahājānanda Svāmī (1781-1830) of the Svāmīnārāyaṇ *sampradāy*, another popular Vaiṣṇav sect of Gujarat, claims to belong to the same lineage of Śrīvaiṣṇav *ācāryas* starting with Rāmānuja (Williams 2004, 63). By the middle of the nineteenth century, Puṣṭimārg (110, 323 people), Śrīvaiṣṇav (72, 092 people), and Svāmīnārāyaṇ (32, 481 people) constituted the three most popular Vaiṣṇav *sampradāys* of Ahmedabad (*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* Vol. IV, *Ahmedabad* district, 1879, 34).

³⁹ After Gujarat was conquered by the Delhi Sultanate in the early fourteenth century, Sultan Ahmad Shah established Ahmedabad as the capital of Gujarat (known then as Gurjardesh) in 1411. Gujarat was then annexed to the Mughal Empire in 1573, and Ahmedabad became a provincial capital. For centuries Ahmedabad remained the commercial capital of the Gujarat region, even after Bombay became the centre of the colonial Presidency in western India. Gandhinagar would eventually replace Ahmedabad as capital of Gujarat in the years after 1960, when Gujarat emerged as a separate state (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 2-21).

SA Clarke, a pastor from a church in London who visited Ahmedabad in the early 1650s, described the streets of Ahmedabad as being filled with shops selling “perfumes, spices, ... silks, cotton, calico, and choice of Indian and Chinese rarities, owned, and sold by the fair spoken, but crafty *Bannians*” (31). In 1626, Sir Thomas Herbert, an English traveler provided a more detailed description of *baniyās*, as individuals who are excellent arithmeticians, good at navigation, who do not eat or drink with a Christian, and who are second to the “Priests”: “the Priests and Merchants (appropriating the first & second to themselves) are more superstitious then the casts of Souldiers and Mechanicks, who assume a liberty of Meats and Wine in variety” (42-51). In addition to characterizing Brahmins and *baniyās* as holding the “first” and “second” place in the caste hierarchy, Herbert repeatedly emphasizes how members of the *baniyā* community are strict vegetarians and do not consume alcohol. Regarding their religious practices, he writes how *baniyās* bathe often, and in the mornings they “duck three times” in the water, face the east, and while murmuring some phrases, “adore” the sun.⁴⁰ Herbert also provides a drawing of a *baniyā* standing in front of an image (47) and writes how “Above all, their Idolatry to Pagods (or Images of deformed demons) is observable” (51). Though he does not tell us which deity is depicted, he does explain how “the pagod” is built under a banyan tree, is adorned with silk of all colors, and individuals sing songs and perform “many mysteries” in front of the image (51-52). The description of *baniyās* as similar to Brahmins in the social and ritual hierarchy of Gujarat is also noted by the French traveler, Francois Pyrard de Laval (1578-1623), who visited parts of western India in the early seventeenth century. In his description of the merchants he encountered

⁴⁰ This is a reference to *sandhyā* rituals.

in Cambay, Pyrard de Laval notes how “The Banians ... observe the same manner of life as the Bramenis, albeit they wear not the cord” (249).

The writings of the British traveller, John Ovington, further support the descriptions of *baniyās* provided by his contemporaries. Ovington, a chaplain to the Queen, traveled to Surat in 1689. He exclaims how “The *Bannians* are by much the most numerous, and by far the wealthiest of all the Pagans of India” (278). He also writes that *baniyās* abstain from eating the flesh of living creatures (283), and remain clean by performing “constant Ablutions and daily Washings” (315). Ovington provides detailed descriptions of the *baniyā* lifestyle and how they spend their money on “their women,” and on lavish weddings. The display of wealth by *baniyā* families is a subject that I will return to below, however, an interesting point that Ovington brings up is the manner by which *baniyās* take oaths or make promises. He explains this as follows: “As we lay our Hands in swearing upon the Holy Bible, so he [the *baniyā*] puts his hand upon the venerable Cow, with this Imprecation, *That he may eat of the Flesh of that Blest Animal, if what he says be not true*” (231-232). According to Jha, in addition to taking an oath by touching a cow, Hindu merchants would also make vows by placing their hands upon a deity or by visiting a sacred shrine (37). It is perhaps not that surprising how, in order to resolve ambiguities in trade and to establish trust, merchants would take oaths using religious symbols/insignia. However, what I am interested in is how a merchant’s religious affiliations and activities, such as patronizing a religious shrine and sponsoring and hosting religious festivals, can further enhance the prestige and respectability (*ābrū*) of a merchant family. That is to say, a community for whom social stability, honor and prestige, and community trust are important – especially for their financial prosperity

(much like for political elites), strong links with religious sites, persons, and activities would only help facilitate the (re)production of such forms of symbolic capital. To draw on Pierre Bourdieu, “the exhibition of the material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is likely to be in itself a source of material profit in a good-faith economy in which good repute is the best, if not the only, economic guarantee” (1977, 180). A merchant’s *ābrū*, which could mean both “honor” and “credit,” was accumulated over years of honest commercial dealings and by maintaining a good reputation in the community.⁴¹ In addition to conducting their business with integrity and through establishing networks of trust, many *baniyās* established and maintained their good social standing through patterns of religious patronage and by exercising moral leadership in the community (Haynes 1991, 38).

So far, the seventeenth century writings of European travelers have presented a picture of the *baniyā* as an individual who belonged to one of the most prominent and wealthy social groups of Gujarat; who maintained a vegetarian diet and abstained from drinking alcohol; one who followed purity rules by constantly washing; and who performed and participated in religious activities. It is important, however, to keep in mind that many of these early European travelers did not differentiate between Jain and Hindu *baniyās* and, even when discussing Hindu *baniyās*, they may have been describing

⁴¹ The system of the *huṇḍī* (credit note or bill of exchange) exemplifies how important a merchant’s credit-worthiness was to participate in commercial and financial dealings. As Lakshmi Subramanian explains, *huṇḍīs* had a twofold function: “to enable one to get advances and or alternatively to remit funds from one place to another” (1987, 477). Gujarati *baniyās* were masters of the *huṇḍī* system, which became the dominant financial instrument among the traders, bankers, and merchants of western India by the eighteenth century. The reputation or credit of a merchant banker would determine whether his *huṇḍī* would be accepted. This system depended on the honor and credit-worthiness of merchant bankers so much so that if “these *huṇḍīs* had lost their viability, then the merchants who carried them would have been unable to make their purchases, and the whole trading network could have collapsed” (1991, 38).

the activities of Brahmin merchants. Having said that, I think it is safe to presume that by the seventeenth century, and probably even earlier, Gujarati *baniyās* not only enjoyed a high social and economic standing, but also maintained a relatively high ritual or caste status. Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, like Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and their earliest descendents may have introduced strict purity rules into Puṣṭimārg because they were Brahmins themselves. However, the acceptance and continued observance of such purity rules by the *baniyā* lay population may have been facilitated by the fact that *baniyās* were already following Brahmanic rules of purity and pollution. That is to say, the prospect of “Sanskritization” or “upward mobility” may not have been the motivation behind, or the outcome of, *baniyās* converting into Puṣṭimārg, as it mostly likely was for *kunbī* and *pāṭidār* agricultural communities.⁴² Instead, Puṣṭimārg may have been enthusiastically adopted by the *baniyā* community of Gujarat because it introduced a religious ethos that aligned well with the religious, ritual, aesthetic, and economic needs and practices of the *baniyā* community: Puṣṭimārg provided a new, fixed, and stable sectarian identity around a deity who was already popular in Gujarat; it offered a life-affirming and householder-based theology and liturgy, one in which practitioners were free to pursue wealth and

⁴² For example, Shandip Saha argues how as a result of “its emphasis on a householder life grounded in strict vegetarianism, simplicity, restraint, and frugality, membership in the *Puṣṭi Mārga* conferred upon members of the mercantile community the status of *brahmins* in Gujarati society” (2004, 114). Though I do not want to completely dismiss this claim, based on the above descriptions of Gujarati *baniyā* communities in seventeenth century European travelogues and in the work by Murari Kumar Jha (2009), it appears that (Hindu?) *baniyās* may have already been practicing strict vegetarianism and were following purity rules by the time Puṣṭimārg became popular in Gujarat. This claim could be further corroborated (or perhaps even discredited) with further historical sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For now, I would like to nuance Saha’s approach for understanding why Puṣṭimārg gained popularity among the Gujarati *baniyā* community. The prospect of upward caste mobility can more aptly describe the *kunbī* and *pāṭidār* communities’ adoption of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity. As Francoise Mallison argues, “The ascension of the Kaṇabī-Paṭela is often due to their ‘vallabhization’, with the prestige of its vegetarianism and stricter purity rules, which represents a certain form of brahmanization that offered an attractive pattern of life” (1994, 52).

prosperity so long as they dedicate all their worldly belongings to Kṛṣṇa first; finally, the sect was led by a hereditary community of Brahmin householders, whose ritual purity rules conformed with those of *baniyā* householders.

Patterns of Puṣṭimārg Patronage in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

We are able to see further examples of the *baniyā* community's high caste status as well as their explicit ties to Puṣṭimārg in later historical works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An excellent source for understanding the political, social, and religious conditions of Mughal-period Ahmedabad is Ali Muhammad Khan's *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, which was completed in 1761. The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*'s *khātimā* or supplement provides a more detailed description of the various caste groups, communities, and religious shrines located in Ahmedabad. My discussion, therefore, draws from the supplement, which was translated from Persian by Syed Nawab Ali and Charles Seddon (1928). Ali Muhammad Khan was raised in Ahmedabad and was eventually appointed as the imperial *divān* of the province by the Mughal administration. His access to state papers and documents, on which the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* is based, was enabled by his role as *divān*. In the supplement, Ali Muhammad Khan begins with describing the city, its inhabitants, and its bazaars:

“...it would be no exaggeration to say that so grand and magnificent a city is to be found nowhere else. Bazaars are spacious and well arranged; its inhabitants, both men and women, are handsome... Cloth of fine texture, which is exported by land and sea, yields a profitable trade... and suburbs 360 (some say 380) in number enlarge the city.” (1928, 7)

In his description of the Ahmedabadi *baniyā* community, Ali Khan notes how the community is comprised of “Meshri” *baniyās* and “Shravak” *baniyās*. He then goes

on to list the eighty-four sub-divisions of the *baniyā* community in Ahmedabad (116-118). Ali Khan uses “Shravak” to refer to those *baniyās* who follow the Jain religion. As for the “Meshri” *baniyās*, Ali Khan describes them as individuals who “follow the Brahmans and worship Mahadev, Bhavani, and Krishna...there are some who worship Krishna, paying at the same time some respect to Mahadev; these are called Vaishnavas and Bhagats whose religious preceptors are called Gosains, who are these Brahmans who consider themselves adopted sons of Krishna” (118). What this passage clearly suggests is that by this point in the mid-eighteenth century – approximately two hundred years after Viṭṭhalanātha is said to have visited western India, the Puṣṭimārg sect had firmly rooted itself into the religious landscape of Gujarat. It is also interesting that the supplement describes Puṣṭimārgī *baniyās* as patronizing shrines to Śiva as well. This blurring or relaxed understanding of sectarian boundaries is also illustrated by Douglas Haynes in his study of merchant communities in Surat. In Surat, Haynes notes, the Chakawala family maintained a banking firm during the late eighteenth century. They “apparently saw no contradiction in building a temple to Shiva in the village of Katargam while donating thousands of rupees in *seva* to Vaishnava deities” (1991, 59). Though limited, these historical examples of Puṣṭimārgī *baniyās* patronizing both Kṛṣṇa and Śiva shrines are significant for two reasons: firstly, these early references attest to a sense of sectarian identity that is markedly different from the strict sectarianism practiced by Puṣṭimārgīs today and, therefore, complicates our reading of sectarian identity formation in the Puṣṭimārg community.⁴³ Secondly, we do not know exactly what Ali Khan means

⁴³ Today, for example, orthodox Puṣṭimārgīs will not visit temples or sacred shrines dedicated to other deities. Most Puṣṭimārgīs also do not celebrate festivals like Navarātrī in their homes nor would they have images of other deities in their domestic shrines.

when he says that *baniyās* who worship Kṛṣṇa also pay “at the same time some respect to Mahadev.” It could be similar to what Haynes has described, namely, that the same *baniyā* family would donate money to both Vaiṣṇav and Śaiva shrines. As was briefly discussed above, prominent *baniyā* families were continuously engaged in furthering their reputation or *ābrū* within the merchant community – and religious giving was a significant part of this process. So even if a *baniyā* family was “strictly” Puṣṭimārg and not followers of Śiva, patronizing a non-Vaiṣṇav temple through gift-giving may have been a means to generate status and prestige for the merchant family.

To continue with Ali Muhammad Khan’s work, unlike the early European travelogues discussed above, the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* lists all the prominent mosques, Hindu shrines and pilgrimage sites, as well as Jain temples which were located within and in the outskirts of Ahmedabad city. There are two Vaiṣṇav shrines mentioned by Ali Khan which are certainly of the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy*: a shrine which apparently houses the footprints of “Acharya Gosain, the founder of Vaishnavism in Asarwa,” namely, Vallabhacārya (132); and, that of “Gokal Chandrama,” which most likely refers to the *svarūp* Gokulchandramajī. This sacred site is described as follows: “[“Gokul Chandrama.] In Raja Mehta’s lane, from olden times kept in the house of one Raghunath Gosain. After the death of his son Brijnath it was removed to Dosiwara, to the house of one Brij Bhukan. Banias go there and worship it five times a day, providing also for its expenses” (129). Other than the prominent *havelīs*, such as Nathdwara and Kankroli, which were becoming popular pilgrimage sites, the fact that the homes of Gosvāmīs served as sacred sites for Puṣṭimārgīs may have rendered some of them inconspicuous to “outside” observers in places like Ahmedabad. However, the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* confirmed one

phenomenon that we have already addressed, that is, donations made by *baniyā* followers were responsible for sustaining the elaborate *sevā* performed in Puṣṭimārg sacred shrines.

If we now turn to works from colonial Gujarat, the *Rās Mālā* (“Garland of Chronicles”) or *Hindu Annals of Western India* by Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1821-1865) is a good source for providing us with a glimpse into the social and religious world of Puṣṭimārgī *baniyās*. Alexander Forbes was a Scottish officer of the East India Company who served as Assistant Collector in Ahmedabad, and was also appointed as Sessions Judge in Surat, Ahmedabad, and Bombay between 1846 and 1864.⁴⁴ In 1848, Forbes solicited the help of Dalpatram Dhayabhai, a Brahmin Gujarati poet from Kathiawar who converted into the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect and who served as his interlocutor and language teacher.⁴⁵ As Aparna Kapadia demonstrates, in the same year, with the help of local elites and the geologist George Fulljames, Forbes was instrumental in the formation of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, a literary society founded for the promotion of the Gujarati language and literature (52). He also encouraged the publication of newspapers, and the development of schools and libraries in Ahmedabad, Surat, and Bombay.

⁴⁴ Though European powers, such as the Portuguese, had begun exerting their authority in parts of western India starting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, British imperial presence was marked by the opening of the East India Company’s first factory in Surat in 1612. The Company Rāj began consolidating power throughout parts of Gujarat with the help of ruling elites, and by taking advantage of the unstable political and economic environment precipitated by declining Mughal power and Maratha incursions into western India. From their base in Bombay, the Company started annexing regions of Gujarat in the late eighteenth century and, by 1820, they had appropriated the administrative and government activities of Ahmedabad, Surat, and other districts of Gujarat. Gujarat and Maharashtra officially became consolidated as part of the Bombay Presidency in the early years of the nineteenth century, however, many large areas of the Gujarat region and surrounding areas were left under the control of Rājput rulers, local chieftans, and the Maratha Gaikwad of Baroda.

⁴⁵ The Svāmīnārāyaṇ *sampradāy*, today one of the most popular Vaiṣṇav traditions of Gujarat, was established in the early nineteenth century by an ascetic Brahmin named Sahājānand Svāmī (1781-1830).

The *Rās Mālā*, a monumental work divided into four books and spanning over eight hundred pages was published in 1856. In the text, Forbes discusses Gujarat's early-medieval dynasties, Gujarat during the "Mohammedan" period and during Maratha rule, and he focuses on the Rājput̄s of Gujarat, whom he believed formed the political backbone of Gujarat society (54). It is only in book four, in the conclusion, that Forbes presents chapters on "Hindoo Castes," "Town-Life," and "Religious Services-Festivals." It is in this section that we are, once again, provided with a description of the high caste status held by *baniyās* in Gujarat:

"The Kshutreeya caste is now no longer considered by other Hindoos to be next in rank to the Brahmin; its place has been usurped by the Wāneeās [*baniyās*], a branch of the Vaishya caste, who will not even drink water with Rajpoots, and 'Brahmin-wāneeā' is now a synonymous expression for 'oojulee-wustee' [*ujlī vastī*], or high-caste population. The Rajpoots use animal foods and spirituous liquor, both unclean in the last degree to their puritanic neighbors..." (Forbes, 536-537)

This resonates with earlier descriptions of *baniyās* by European travelers. However, Alexander Forbes explicitly invokes a type of caste classification that we have not seen before, that of the "Brahmin-*baniyā*." Both Brahmin and *baniyās* follow strict caste rules regarding food restrictions (whom one can dine with and who can prepare meals, for example), observe a vegetarian diet, do not drink alcohol, and purify themselves by bathing often (540, 552). Harald Tambs-Lyche confirms the existence of such a caste taxonomy, which is peculiar to Gujarat. However, he argues that this characterization only "worked" in Gujarat's central regions; "In Saurashtra, Kutch, and in the eastern mountains, Rajputs and other martial, landowning castes remained politically and culturally dominant" (2010, 108).

In his description of the daily routine of Brahmin-*baniyā* householders, Forbes continues to explain how:

“They rise from their beds about four o’clock in the morning, repeating the name of their tutelary divinity, as, O! Muhā Dev!, O! Thākorjee (Vishnoo), O! Umbā Mother. The pundit, or Sanskrit scholar, mutters a verse ... The Bhugut, or religious layman, chants the praises of his deity in the vernacular stanzas of some poet... Brahmins and Bhuguts are frequently under the vow to bathe before sunrise, in which case, as soon as they are risen, and have said their prayers, they either bathe in warm water at home, or set off for that purpose to the tank or the river. After bathing they assume a silk garment that has been washed the day before, and worship” (552).

There are several important points that Forbes alludes to in this depiction of the *baniyā* householder’s daily activities. The first, which we have also already discussed, is how the religious adepts of Gujarat are predominantly followers of Śaiva, Śakta, and Vaiṣṇav traditions. The second, to be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, is how laypersons or “bhuguts” sing songs to their tutelary deities in vernacular languages (of Gujarati or Brajbhāṣā, I presume). And finally, the last practice which Forbes discusses is one that orthodox Puṣṭimārgis still perform today, namely, *apras* (> Skt. *asparṣa*, “untouched”) *sevā*. As Forbes illustrates, prior to performing their daily worship, a person bathes and then dresses in a garment that has been washed the day before. Though Forbes does not use the phrase “*apras sevā*” nor does he explain its significance, it is a practice that ensures a person remains ritually pure from the moment they have bathed till they have completed their worship – *if* they do not come in contact with any polluting substance or person.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Forbes in fact lists a range of substances and activities that can render one impure on pages 554-555.

Although Forbes does present, in great detail, the various domestic ritual practices of Brahmins (552-555), he unfortunately does not do the same for *baniyās*.⁴⁷ Instead he explains how “Wāneeās, and trading people generally, set off early in the morning to have a sight of the Dev in his temple ...Others worship the first thing in the morning the ‘sacred basil,’ ... [and] when they return home to dinner, paying, perhaps, on their way, a second visit to the temple. ” (555). Since this project is primarily concerned with Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā* practices it is unfortunate that so far none of the historical travelogues and texts have presented a description of devotional rituals occurring in the home. This is perhaps due to the fact that most Europeans did not have ready access to the domestic lives and spheres of Indians, and if they did, they most certainly would not have been permitted to observe the *sevā* practices being performed within the home, especially by the female members of *baniyā* families. Furthermore, in addition to the general European and Orientalist preoccupation with understanding and depicting Brahmanic and Sanskritic practices, Forbes’ interlocutor was also a Brahmin, albeit a Svāmīnārāyaṇ follower. This may be another reason why Forbes provided a detailed presentation of Brahmin domestic practices and not those of Vaiṣṇav *baniyās*, like Puṣṭimārgīs or even Svāmīnārāyaṇīs.

One source from this period, which does provide an indication of domestic *sevā* being performed, is the *Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society*, a publication of the Royal Asiatic Society. In its sixteenth volume, published in 1828, the

⁴⁷ He explains how each Brahmin household has a “Dev-mundeer,” where seven or eight images are placed, including the *śalagram*, an image of an infant Kṛṣṇa (“Bāl Mookoond”), Śiva, Gaṇeṣa, Dūrga, Sūrya, Hanumān, and others, to which the “sixteen services” are performed. In the morning, he describes how Brahmins worship the sun while reciting the Gāyatrī *mantra* on a *rudrākṣa* rosary; before eating they perform “Turpun;” performs *homa*, the fire-sacrifice, and so on (552-555).

British Orientalist Horace H. Wilson wrote a chapter entitled “A Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus” (1-136). Wilson devotes several pages to discussing the Puṣṭimārg sect (85-98) and, in passing, mentions the following important point about its followers:

“Besides their public demonstrations of respect, pictures and images of Gopāla are kept in the houses of the members of the sect, who, before they sit down to any of their meals, take care to offer a portion to the idol. Those of the disciples who have performed the triple *Samarpana* [initiation], eat only from the hands of each other; and the wife or child that has not exhibited the same mark of devotion to the *Guru*, can neither cook for such a disciple, nor eat in his society.” (94)

This brief description by Wilson draws attention to the ways in which Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity was intersecting with, or permeated, domestic spaces and practices – at least by the beginning of the nineteenth century if not much earlier. For example, according to Wilson, Puṣṭimārgī homes contain pictures and images of Kṛṣṇa, and although this is not explicitly mentioned by Wilson, these images were perhaps kept in domestic shrines within the home. The excerpt goes on to indicate how Puṣṭimārgīs first offer food to Kṛṣṇa before consuming it themselves and that the wife (or any female member of the household) cannot prepare any meals unless she has obtained initiation first. Thus the everyday practices of food preparation, consumption, and the organization of domestic space – which already on their own are markers of identity and social positioning (since caste rules also apply) – are further inflected by a family’s sectarian identity as Puṣṭimārgī. Considering that Alexander Forbes served as the vice-president of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, he worked, lived, and wrote about his experiences in India well after these volumes were published, and that his primary interlocutor was a Gujarati Vaiṣṇav, it is surprising that he does not go into detail about the domestic religious practices of Gujarati Puṣṭimārgī families.

Forbes, however, does describe the opulence with which religious activities take place at a “temple of Vishnoo,” where five daily services are said to occur (596). Since most Vaiṣṇav shrines in Gujarat, including Swāminārāyaṇ ones, were by this period following the liturgical structure of Puṣṭimārg temples, it is sometimes not very clear which sectarian tradition a temple belongs to (Mallison 1983, 246; Saha 2008, 310). However, based on the descriptions Forbes provides of the services taking place, it appears to be a Puṣṭimārg temple. While describing the morning service, Forbes alludes to the costly nature of the *sevā* offerings: “at this time his breakfast is brought to him, which consists of rice and milk, and such other articles of food as rich men use” (597). H.H. Wilson, in his essay in the *Asiatic Researches*, also comments on the lavishness of Puṣṭimārg temple worship as follows: “Vallabha introduced ... that it was the duty of the teachers and his disciples to worship their deity, not in nudity and hunger, but in costly apparel and choice food, not in solitude and mortification, but in the pleasures of society, and the enjoyment of the world” (90). Though Wilson and even contemporary scholars, such as Francoise Mallison (1994), attribute the establishment of the opulent and highly aestheticized form of Puṣṭimārg temple liturgy to Vallabha, it is important to remember that the sophisticated and costly *sevā* rituals currently performed in Puṣṭimārg temples were most likely institutionalized by Vallabha’s son Viṭṭhalanātha and only became crystallized in the years after him (Saha 2008, 308).⁴⁸ However what can be deduced from this discussion is that from the very early days of Puṣṭimārg’s presence in Gujarat, mercantile communities continued to translate “through religious giving some of their

⁴⁸ Saha explains how there are no accounts depicting the manner in which *sevā* must have been performed in Vallabha’s time, or even by Vallabha himself. In the seventeenth century hagiography, *Śrīnāthjī kī Prākāṭya Vārtā*, which does describe *sevā* being performed at Govardhan during Vallabha’s lifetime, the *sevā* is depicted as “a relatively simple affair” (Harirāy 1988: 11-12 qtd in Saha 2008, 308).

financial capital, to which a stigma might be attached if it were either allowed to accumulate visibly or exchanged for personal possessions, into symbolic capital valued throughout high-caste society, thus generating personal authority” (Haynes 1991, 59).

Thus far we have been presented with examples of how Puṣṭimārg *baniyās* engage in the patronage of *havelīs*. They may do this either through donating money and supplies for a particular *sevā*, such as the extravagant mid-day meal of *rāj-bhog*, through sponsoring a feast for a religious festival or hosting a Gosvāmī’s celebration, and also by providing monetary sustenance to the Gosvāmīs directly. Wealthy *baniyā* families do this primarily because they are followers of Puṣṭimārg and regard religious giving as acts of devotion. Indeed, the Puṣṭimārg initiation *mantra* itself requires the relinquishing of one’s *man*, *tan*, and *dhan* or mind, body, and wealth/worldly “possessions” to Kṛṣṇa.⁴⁹ At the same time, however, and without compromising or questioning the devotional sentiments or intentions of practitioners, I argue that religious giving also provides wealthy *baniyā* families an opportunity to (re-)produce family honor and prestige, or *ābrū*. Like other *ābrū*-generating or *ābrū*-exhibiting activities, I suggest that religious patronage can also become a vehicle for displaying and producing one’s social status. In the same European travelogues we have discussed above, the other ways in which *baniyā* families are shown to display or transmute their wealth into socially acceptable or socially reputable forms, includes rites of passage such as wedding ceremonies, the adornment of female members of their family, and through philanthropy.

Returning to John Ovington’s seventeenth century travel writings in Surat, he relates a story of a very wealthy *baniyā* from Ahmedabad who, during public festivals

⁴⁹ See footnote 10 for a translation of the initiation *mantras*.

would serve his guests in plates of gold, but he was then killed by a jealous rival.

Ovington remarks how:

“Sumptuousness and State suit not very well with the Life and Condition of a *Bannian*; they must not both flourish long together. This keeps our Brokers at *Surat*, who are *Bannians*, from all costly disbursements, tho’ they are reckon’d by some to be worth 15, by others 30 Lacks of Roupies ... without any show of a luxurious Garniture, either on their Dishes, or in their Houses. Their main Cost is expended upon their Women.” (319-320)

This portrayal of a *baniyā* as a person who is simultaneously wealthy and yet lives austere, is not uncommon. Whether it is out of fear of another’s jealousy or evil-eye (*nazar*, *dr̥ṣṭi*) or because, as Douglas Haynes argues, a social stigma might be attached to a family’s wealth if it were “allowed to accumulate visibly or [be] exchanged for personal possessions” (1991, 59), many *baniyās* displayed their wealth in less conspicuous ways – such as by expending it upon their women, as Ovington writes. He gives a detailed description of how many jewels and ornaments a *baniyā* woman wears: “... they are deckt from the Crown of the Head to the very feet...[the jewels] are composed of a variety of Diamonds, Rubies, Saphirs, and other Stones of Esteem” (320). Another occasion on which wealthy *baniyā* families are described as spending lavishly is during wedding ceremonies. Both Thomas Herbert (53) and Ovington describe how the bride and groom are richly attired and paraded publicly: “Flags, Flambeaus, Musick, State-Coaches, and Led Horses, are all too little for this Day’s Solemnity” (328). Finally, the seventeenth century French traveller Jean de Thevenot, a contemporary of Ovington, presents us with an example of how a rich *baniyā*, named “Gopy,” paid for the construction of a well or “*Tanquie*” in Surat which supposedly provided all the drinking water of the city. He concludes his description of the well by stating how “It is certainly a

Work worthy of a King” (1687, III.25). In addition to forms of religious giving, such examples, though brief, indicate how wealthy Gujarati *baniyās* chose to exhibit their wealth. It is also interesting, though not surprising, that expending wealth on the female members of *baniyā* families was noteworthy enough for Ovington to include it in his writings. Such descriptions of *baniyā* women are also found in the writings of Thomas Herbert (46). Women’s bodies and their corporeal practices (such as having their hair tied or left loose, their *sārī* length and material, quantity and quality of adornment) have been, and continue to be, signifiers of a woman’s caste and marital status, as well as sites for displaying family prestige and honor.

Conclusion

I have attempted to map the ways in which Puṣṭimārg was patronized by the political and mercantile elites of western India from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The *baniyā* community of Gujarat, as I have demonstrated, enjoyed a high social and caste status at the time of the arrival of Puṣṭimārg in the region. This may explain why, in moments of expansion and consolidation, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs turned to the *baniyā* communities for support, and why Puṣṭimārg in turn was so enthusiastically adopted by these commercial groups.

With the writings of Alexander Forbes and H.H. Wilson, I traced *baniyā* patronage of Puṣṭimārg through to the nineteenth century. In addition to being an act of devotion, I argue that religious giving becomes a site for the production and display of prestige, or *ābrū*, for wealthy *baniyā* families. In order to proceed with this chronological trajectory and arrive at our discussion of the contemporary urban domestic *sevā* practices

of Puṣṭimārgī female practitioners, in the following two chapters I examine how *baniyā* families engaged with the processes of colonial modernity, including the new colonial economy, the English education system, and socio-religious reform movements. What emerges in this context is class as a social category and signifier of status. Ultimately, I demonstrate how Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities and women's domestic practices inform and become implicated in the shifting class politics of the Bombay Presidency.

CHAPTER 2

Colonial Contexts:

***Baniyās* and the Formation of Elite Identity in the Bombay Presidency**

This Chapter describes the formation of Puṣṭimārg upper-class identities in the Bombay Presidency. *Baniyās*, in their traditional commercial roles as bankers, traders, and money-lenders, facilitated the expansion and consolidation of the East India Company and the British Rāj in western India. Many great *baniyā* merchants, referred to as *śeṭhs*, also became actively involved in administrative roles in British governance and provided the capital for city improvement and urbanization projects. With the emergence of large scale industries, such as the cotton mills, many merchant *śeṭhs* – who hailed from different sub-caste and religious backgrounds – became leading industrialists and capitalists. As this chapter demonstrates, in addition to wealthy Pārsi and Jain families, Hindu *śeṭhs* also began to represent the upper-classes of the Bombay Presidency.

Puṣṭimārg upper-class status was marked by new forms of consumption and philanthropic practices. Religious patronage also took on more modern forms, including *baniyā* participation in *havelī* committees and Vaiṣṇav societies, as well as their engagement with print culture. Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs*, however, remained aloof from one of the most important processes of colonial modernity, namely Western learning and English education. In the Bombay Presidency, unlike in the Bengal Presidency, the upper-classes and the educated-classes – those who came to represent the middle-classes – were two entirely different social groups.

The Formation of the Anglo-Baniyā Alliance

British imperial presence was established in India with the opening of the first English East India Company (hereafter, EIC) factory in Surat in 1612. The accumulation of vast amounts of wealth through aggressive trade activities, as well as having a strong military presence in India, facilitated the EIC's control of Surat in 1759, and then over Bharuch in 1772.⁵⁰ It was only after the British had finally defeated the Marathas in 1817 that the emerging colonial power officially appropriated the administrative and government activities of Ahmedabad as well. By the beginning decades of the nineteenth century, cities and towns across Gujarat and Maharashtra were absorbed as part of the Bombay Presidency and were governed from the growing cosmopolitan center of Bombay.⁵¹ Large areas of western India, however, remained under the control of the Maratha Gaikwad of Baroda, and various other Rājput kings, Muslim *nawabs*, and local chieftans.

To a large degree British presence was seen as a welcoming change after the turmoil and uncertainty Gujarat experienced as a result of the fall of the Mughals and the ransacking of cities by Maratha armies. Political destabilization precipitated by the weakening Mughal empire and repeated Maratha incursions into Gujarat caused trade routes and lines of communication to become increasingly insecure and disrupted across western and northern India (Yagnik and Seth 2010, 66-67; Dasgupta 139-144). The subsequent isolation suffered by cities in western India, as well as the expansion of private European trade in the area, led to a decline in *baniyā* confidence and business

⁵⁰ For more on the conquest of Surat by the British, see Torri (1998).

⁵¹ Bombay became the capital of the Bombay Presidency in 1818.

activity in the first half of the eighteenth century. During Maratha rule of Ahmedabad, for instance, many merchant families left the city and moved their businesses further south to cities like Surat, which was emerging as a new rival to Ahmedabad and Cambay as a center of trade (Gillion 29-32). All these factors may explain why the Gujarati business communities – Hindu, Muslim, and Jain alike – welcomed and were supportive of the East India Company during the early phases of British activity in western India. The British, themselves, promised to restore a city like Ahmedabad back to its “original glory.” For example, in 1817 after the British had finally annexed Ahmedabad from the Marathas, the British Resident at Baroda made the following remarks:

“...Under the administration of British laws which protect property and encourage every exertion of lucrative industry, the extensive merchandise for which Ahmedabad was once distinguished would become renewed ... it may not be hazarding too much to say, that the city of Ahmedabad placed in the hands of the British Government promises to prove a source not only of great Revenue, but a possession worthy of a splendid and enlightened nation.” Gillion 34-35

An “Anglo-Bania” alliance, which Lakshmi Subramanian describes as “the alignment of the indigenous credit system to Imperial strategy” (1987, 474) began to emerge between the East India Company and mercantile communities even before the EIC officially took over the administrative and governmental activities of cities in the Bombay Presidency. This relationship appeared lucrative for both parties. Many *baniyās* found that the EIC offered a sense of security and protection, and also presented opportunities for business expansion. The EIC, on the other hand, saw its alliance with the Indian mercantile groups as a way to guarantee the support of local elites and to ensure the supply of indigenous capital towards their imperial and state-building activities. Lakshmi Sumbranian argues how this “Anglo-Bania” alliance facilitated the

consolidation of the Bombay Presidency itself: "...[it] became in effect the dominating factor in the history of the West Coast during the crucial half century of transition, and constituted in a real sense the prelude to the triumph of Bombay" (474).

From the 1760s onwards, Company officials felt that they did not have enough financial resources to support their civil and military ventures in Bombay. By the closing decades of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century the EIC became heavily dependent on the cooperation of the Gujarati *baniyā* community and the use of the financial system that they operated for accessing and circulating capital. For example, the *hundī* credit system proved crucial during the first Anglo-Maratha war (1775-1782) since it enabled the British army to purchase supplies (485-86). As Subramanian asserts, "If the European merchants of Bombay city had provided the ideological rationale behind expansion, it was Bania capital that fed the fighting armies, clothed the men locked in battle and kept them in good humour" (510).⁵²

On the one hand, scholars like Lakshmi Subramanian acknowledge the imperative role played by the Gujarati *baniyā* merchants in facilitating the expansion and consolidation of the Bombay Presidency. On the other hand, one finds a different retelling of the historical relationship between the British and *baniyās* in the work of Michelguglielmo Torri who adamantly argues against Subramanian. For example, he dismisses any claims made by Subramanian on the role the Surat *baniyās* had in enabling the victory of the British over the Surat castle in 1759 (1987, 1998), and instead attributes

⁵² By the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the British colonial government began to perceive their dependency on the *baniyā* merchant communities as a sign of political weakness. They slowly turned to other sources of capital and credit, such as from their increasing trade with China, public loan flotations, agency houses in Bombay and Calcutta, and from bankers in London (Hardiman 1996, 44; Subramanian 509-510).

British ascendancy in Surat to the Mughal nobility. According to Torri, the *baniyā* communities are said to have resisted the establishment of British paramourcy in Gujarat, and that “...the merchants as a body (both Hindu and non-Hindu) were totally incapable of governing their own destinies” (1998, 259). To a certain extent Torri represents *baniyā* communities as mere “pawns” in the colonial order of things, whom were approached and manipulated as collaborators in the colonial and imperial enterprise at the whim of the British. When the European rulers decided to “change the rules” at the end of the eighteenth century, Torri explains how

...both the Mughal nobles *and the Bania bankers* dropped through the trapdoor of history. The Banias – as well as the Mughal nobles and the Parsi merchant princes – far from being partners, even junior partners, were, quite simply, expendable collaborators who were used as long as they were judged useful, to be afterwards discarded as old rags by their masters. (1987, 710).

Both Subramanian and Torri make valid points – although, I believe, Torri’s dismissal of the collaborative role the *baniyās* had with the British to be an extreme position. In addition to this economic-based *baniyā* alliance, I am interested in trying to understand how the social-cultural and religious identities of Hindu Gujarati *baniyās* – many of whom were Puṣṭimārgī – were influenced by the colonial encounter. Thus far, we know that from a very early period Gujarati *baniyās* were economically collaborating with the British. However, did this relationship burgeon in other areas? For example, since *baniyās* held a high social status (as “Brahmin-*baniyās*”) did they, like the Brahmin and land-owning (*zamindār*) communities in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies, attend English schools in the early phases of English education? Did they take on civil servant or professional positions in the new colonial economy of the Bombay Presidency? How

did the emerging social and religious reform movements influence the Puṣṭimārg community? Collectively, these questions also prompt us to interrogate how the Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* family was affected or marked by the processes involved in the production of class in nineteenth and twentieth century western India.

As noted above, the Gujarati *baniyā* community was influenced by the arrival and consolidation of the EIC in significant ways. As Bombay was growing into the commercial and administrative center of EIC rule in western India, *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities began migrating into the metropolis from areas in Gujarat during the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century. Increased security on trade routes allowed *baniyā* communities to circulate more easily across western and northern India. Furthermore, while continuing to provide money-lending and exchange services to both indigenous and European customers, many merchants also began exporting opium to China, an industry that was, until then, the sole monopoly of the EIC. In his study on the merchant communities of western India in the colonial era, Claude Markovits demonstrates how this “Malwa opium” trade played a vital role in the accumulation of capital among Parsi, Ahmedabad, Marwari, and Kathiwar merchants in the first decades of the nineteenth century (2008,198).

With regards to administrative roles in British governance, in Ahmedabad, for example, the great merchants or *śeṭhs* were actively involved in city improvement and urbanization projects. After the annexation of Ahmedabad in 1817, J.A. Dunlop, the British revenue commissioner based in Ahmedabad, requested funds from the Bombay government to repair the city’s walls and to establish a police force. When his appeals went unanswered, he turned to the great *baniyā-śeṭhs* of the city for financial support.

The *śeṭhs* of Ahmedabad recommended a small increase in duties on export and import goods to raise the necessary funds for public works. A Town Wall Fund Committee was then formed, which consisted of the judge and collector of Ahmedabad, as well as the *qazi* and *nagarśeṭh* (the leading *śeṭh* of Ahmedabad). The Town Wall Fund Committee thus marked the beginning of the joint collaboration between British officials and Ahmedabad mercantile elites in governing the city. The Committee, which would later evolve into the Municipality of Ahmedabad, also began to manage city sanitation and water supply (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 103-107).⁵³ Although there were many disagreements between the merchants and the British in subsequent years, their cooperation with the British was made apparent during the 1857 Rebellion. This alliance was motivated by the merchants' own concerns regarding the security of trade routes and subsequent loss of capital during this period of political unrest. As Yagnik and Sheth note, during the Revolt, the merchants of Ahmedabad requested the Town Wall Fund Committee to support the allocation of hundreds of additional security guards in the city, and the *nagarśeṭh* even offered the British the use of his private mail network to gather intelligence for their military expeditions (113). However, despite cooperating so actively with the British, the traditional positions of power and prestige that the ruling merchants experienced and exercised were slowly being appropriated by the colonial power. For example, a year after the Revolt, the *nagarśeṭh* Prembhai Himabhai protested against the

⁵³ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries several *śeṭhs* who were prominent followers of Puṣṭimārg also became members of the Ahmedabad Municipality. For example, *śeṭh* Śrī Achratlal Parikh (b.1881) was a member of the committee from 1910-1915. He also served as a director of several textile mills, including Vijay Mills (Ahmedabad), Gopal Mills (Bharoach), Vadodra Spinning and Weaving Company (Vadodra), et cetera (Shah 1952, 106). Another wealthy *śeṭh* who served as a member of the Ahmedabad Municipality was Śrī Mangaldas Girdhardas (b.1882). Like Achratlal Parikh, Girdhardas was a Puṣṭimārgī and also accumulated his wealth by managing several textile mills in Ahmedabad, Bombay, and Jabalpur (109).

decision to terminate his traditional rights to a percentage of the city's import levies. Although the British government would eventually concede by agreeing to pay him a small annual pension, according to the *nagarseth*, this move by the British compromised his "dignity as an influential citizen" of the city (114-115). Transformations in, or even the erasure of, traditional forms of authority – such as with the *nagarseth*, the *mahājans* or caste-guilds, and the influential role of the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs – occurred not only through direct colonial intervention but also from pressure from the emerging English educated middle classes of the Bombay presidency. Many social and religious reformers drew from these classes, including the well-known critic of Puṣṭimārg, Karsondas Mulji (1832-1871).

English Education and Middle-Class Modernities

English education in the Bombay Presidency was promoted in the early to mid-nineteenth century by Sir Erskine Perry, the President of the Board of Education, and most notably by Mounstuart Elphinstone, who served as the Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827.⁵⁴ The first English school of significance was founded in Bombay in 1827, and the city was also the site of the first English institute of higher learning in the Presidency, the Elphinstone Intitution, which was formed in 1834.⁵⁵ On the one hand, British officials perceived of and presented English education as a tool to create a class of people to serve as civil servants in the administration of India. On the other hand, as Erskine Perry articulated, by introducing the English language – and through it – Western

⁵⁴ Even before the Bombay Government officially began institutionalizing English education in the Bombay Presidency, Christian missionaries had already started establishing English schools as early as 1817 when the London Missionary Society started a school in Surat (Raval 47).

⁵⁵ Elphinstone Institute became Elphinstone College in 1857 upon the founding of Bombay University.

learning and science, the new education system was promoted as an instrument of “change and regeneration” by creating a new class of persons who “would diffuse knowledge widely among the people, and thus raise India to her rightful position beside the nations of the West” (cited in Christine Dobbin 1972, 28). This type of learning, it was hoped, would create a deep moral and cultural transformation and compel these new class of “cultivated gentlemen” to transmit this new-found knowledge through print (text books, novels, and newspapers), through the formation of intellectual societies, and through public lectures – – all the markers and producers of a newly emerging public sphere.

Echoing themes from Thomas B. Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” (1835), the Governor of Bombay, Sir Bartle Frere, during his speech at Bombay University in 1863 described the new graduates as “interpreters – the connecting links between the rulers and the ruled” (31). But who were the graduates, this new class of “cultivated gentlemen,” of institutions like Bombay University and Elphinstone College during this period? British officials, such as Elphinstone and Perry, had hoped it would be members from the leading commercial classes of Bombay, such as the Gujarati *baniyās* and *bhāṭiyās*, who were already economically and administratively collaborating with the British and were the social elites of the city. Much to their disappointment, however, it appeared that the leading *śeṭhs* of the city did not have an interest in the new institutions of Western learning. *Śeṭh* families also did not want their children mixing with poorer children at government schools and did not want to expose their children to Christian teachings in missionary schools. Most merchant *śeṭhs* instead arranged for private

tutoring lessons so that their children could acquire enough proficiency in English to continue their commercial activities (51).

In her study on the prominent *śeṭhs* or “merchant princes” of Bombay city in the mid-nineteenth century, Christine Dobbin demonstrates how no *baniyās* or *bhāṭiyās* (or Muslims) graduated from the higher classes of Elphinstone College between 1827 and 1842 (31). Instead, those who were attending and graduating from the college came from the Marathi-speaking population of Bombay, such as from the *chitpavan* Brahmin, *saraswat* Brahmin, and the *pathare prabhu* castes. These communities, Dobbin notes, already had a “tradition of learning and government service” such as with the Peshwas in the eighteenth century, while the *prabhūs* had served the Portuguese and worked as clerks under the EIC (1972, 31). It was, therefore, not surprising to find male members from these high caste communities eager to enter the new government schools and colleges (1972, 31; 1970, 80). A large number of graduates also came from less prosperous Parsi families, and the remaining body of students drew from lower Hindu castes, and a few belonged to Gujarati Brahmin castes. Males from these poor but traditionally learned communities hoped an English education would serve as a mobilizing force, and would eventually secure a role for them in the new colonial economy as civil servants of the Rāj. Education officials even attempted to raise the tuition costs of schools to attract members from leading *śeṭh* families but this tactic only led to the marginalization of the poor and to the need of increased funding for student scholarships which many *śeṭhs* in fact provided.

One of the primary reasons why British officials were expecting members from the prosperous commercial castes to enter the English education system was because

these communities, as we saw in the case of Ahmedabad, were already participating in arenas of municipal administration and urban planning. For example, in 1836, European business men formed the Chamber of Commerce, an institutional platform from which they could exert pressure on the government to further their commercial projects. The Chamber also included leading *śeṭhs* from the merchant community, and together they petitioned the Government of Calcutta to provide more funds for the infrastructure of Bombay city, in the form of roads, bridges, and lines of communication (1972, 22). *Śeṭhs* were also involved in the emergent Anglo-Indian judicial system. In 1834 thirteen Indians were made Justices of the Peace, and by the 1850s many prominent *śeṭhs* of the city had become Justices.⁵⁶

It was surprising for the British that *baniyās*, who were quite eager to attain positions of leadership in the civic sphere, were uninterested in adopting and leading the cause of Western learning and education. This may have been especially bewildering since many *śeṭhs* were on the Board of Education, served as members of the managing committee of the Elphinstone College, and were active patrons of education. For example, Gujarati *śeṭhs* like Jagannath Shankarshet, Goculdas Tejpal, and Varjivandas Madhavdas – the brother of Gopaldas Madhavdas, the head of the Kapor *baniyā mahājan* in Bombay and a prominent Puṣṭimārgī – provided funds for establishing Anglo-Vernacular schools (33). In the Gujarati Puṣṭimārg historical text, *Puṣṭimārgnām 500 Varṣ: Gauravpūrṇ Itihās* by Vitthaldas Shah (1952), there is a chapter which provides short biographical sketches of prominent Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs* entitled “Vaiṣṇav Āgeṅvān

⁵⁶ For example, *śeṭh* Keela Chand Devchand (b. 1855) and his son *śeṭh* Chhotalal Keela Chand (b. 1878), both Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs, were appointed as Justices of Peace in the late nineteenth century. Keela Chand participated in several business ventures; he served as a broker, an agent for an insurance company, and also exported cotton. His son, Chhotalal, went on to expand his father’s businesses (Shah 1952, 110-111).

Vyakṣāṇā Jīvancaṛitro” (pg. 105-149). In this chapter, it describes how other Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs*, like Mangaldas Girdhardas (b.1882) from Ahmedabad, donated large sums to the Public Education Society of Surat and to the Benares Hindu University. He also served as the director of a school for the deaf and mute in Ahmedabad (109). Śeṭh Keela Chand Devchand (b.1855), another Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav, who was awarded the title of Justice of Peace, is said to have also donated Rs. 40,000 to Benares Hindu University (109-110). Finally, Chhotalal Heera Chand (b.1871), a Puṣṭimārgī and an Ahmedabadi owner of several mills, established a public religious and charitable trust worth Rs. 5,00,000 from which funds were donated to several educational institutes (118). Such acts of public donations by Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs* can be interpreted through the same logic as their acts of religious patronage – as status or *ābrū* producing practices – albeit this time, for a new European public. Sometimes these same *śeṭhs*, like Chhotalal Heera Chand or Keela Chand Devchand, donated large amounts of money for temple building and renovations as well as for government institutes like schools and hospitals (110-118). As Jesse S. Palsetia notes, “By the nineteenth century, Indian charity in emulation of British standards became an important means of gaining recognition in the public culture, as Indian donors and philanthropists sought to become worthy of imperial recognition and advancement” (87).

The fact remains, however, that many of these same *śeṭhs* were not interested in attending the very institutions of learning they funded. The scene in Bombay was not at all similar to colonial Calcutta, where the English educated intelligentsia drew largely from the wealthy land-owning or *zamindār* and *talūqdār* families, as well as from families of “independent income” (Dobbin 1972, 35). In Bombay, colonial officials had

to finally resign to the reality that neither the landed aristocracy nor the wealthy commercial classes had a desire for a Western literary and scientific education. That is to say, in the nineteenth century Bombay Presidency, the “upper classes” and the “educated classes” were two entirely different entities (32).

I. “The Upper Classes” and the Production of Elite *Baniyā* Identities

Before turning to a discussion of the Western educated classes and the rise of reform movements in western India, I want to briefly reflect on how members of the wealthy mercantile communities produced and articulated an upper-class identity in the late nineteenth century context of the Bombay Presidency. To begin with, the coming together of merchants, from different religious and caste backgrounds, for a common economic goal (like the Chamber of Commerce as we discussed above) are instances whereby members of the mercantile communities are seen to function as a class, which is an important marker of their modernity. Another event marking the collaboration among *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā śeṭhs* was the acceptance of the joint-stock principle by merchants and the subsequent expansion of the Bombay cotton mill industry (19). In August 1854, for example, the wealthy Parsi merchant, Manakji Nasarvanji Petit, invited his close business associates, such as the Jewish business man, Elias Sassoon, and the Puṣṭimārgī *baniyā*, Varjivandas Madhavdas, along with two Europeans to start the Oriental Spinning and Weaving Company (20). The cotton mill enterprise would eventually attract the leading *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā śeṭhs* of the city to invest in and promote what would eventually become the leading industry of India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed many Puṣṭimārg *baniyās* and *bhāṭiyās* became wealthy *śeṭhs* by

establishing mill factories across Gujarat. These included, for example, *śeṭh* Balabhai Damordas (b. 1857), the founder of Sarangpur Mills in Ahmedabad (Shah 1952, 105-106); *śeṭh* Achratlal Parikh (b. 1881), the director of several mills including Vijay Mills in Ahmedabad and Gopal Mills in Bharoach (106); *śeṭh* Mangaldas Girdhardas (b. 1882), who managed seven mills across Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Jabalpur (109); *śeṭh* Chhotalal Heerachand (b. 1869), who shifted his business from real estate to building mills, including Chhotalal Mills in Kalol and Kadi, Gujarat, and so on (118). This marked the transformation in the role of the *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā śeṭh* from trader/ banker/ merchant into becoming leading industrialists and capitalists. As Makrand Mehta and Dwijendra Tripathi argue, such collaboration between merchants based on common economic interests and occupational affiliations, and not merely caste identity, are characteristic of a class – in this case, the upper-class (1984, 166).

While traveling through Ahmedabad in 1849, a British officer commented on the new markers of elite status among the wealthy merchants of Gujarat:

In those times [during the Maratha Government] a wealthy man was not known by his dress, carriage, or appearance...[now] the wealthy of the city have many of them set up carriages, and several have built country houses, and enjoy themselves in the ease and comfort which characterizes a peaceful and civilized people. (Gillion 56)

In *The Indian Mission of the Irish Presbyterian Church* (1890), Revered Robert Jeffrey corroborates this description decades later when he comments on the affluent lifestyles of the *baniyās* and *bhāṭiyās* in Gujarat: “These [of the trading class], in such cities as Bombay, Surat, and Ahmedabad, live in great outward state. They build huge showy mansions, one-fifth of the space in which they do not occupy; and drive about in splendid carriages, drawn by magnificent horses, which often cost as much as £500 the pair”

(103). Quoting from the Ahmedabadi historian, Maganlal Vakhatchand, Gillion also describes how in 1851 the upper classes of Ahmedabad were building houses in the English style and were beginning to adopt “changes in dress, including the wearing of socks” (ibid).

As C.A. Bayly argues, shifts in material culture and elite tastes, marked by the increased consumption of imported commodities, allowed for English fabrics and English clothing styles to also gain a foothold in the Indian market (1986, 306). By 1849, the importation of fine textured and low cost English cloth had completely displaced the weaving of cotton cloth in the Ahmedabad district (48). Before the *śēth*-owned Indian mills in Bombay and Ahmedabad began mass producing their own textiles in the mid-1800s, styles and quality of clothing in India – always already a marker of identity – was further influenced by the importation and consumption of European machine-made fabrics. Bayly notes, moreover, how merchants although bought English textiles, many still retained their traditional garb (1986, 307). Thus, European *styles* of clothing may not have necessarily been an indicator of elite status in the way that using European *fabric* was.⁵⁷ Perhaps the key point here, which Bayly alludes to, is how the new English-educated class or middle class – the most “Westernized” Indians at this point – had to “accommodate” Europe in the public sphere through, for example, their dressing practices: wearing trousers, socks, the English frock-coat, et cetera. As was briefly mentioned above and will be discussed in further detail below, in the early phases of

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that this very process, namely, the widespread importation of and preference for European textiles and commodities became the focal point of later *swadeshi* and Gandhian nationalist movements. Cloth, once again, became reconstituted as an important material symbol – and, this time, a moral/spiritual symbol – of identity. For more on cloth and Gandhian nationalism see Lisa Trivedi’s excellent monograph, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation* (2007).

English education in Bombay, those individuals who attended English schools did so in order to uplift their social and economic positions. “Accommodating” Europe, at least in the public sphere, was not necessarily a choice for the middle classes; it was, in fact, necessary. On the other hand, the wealthy merchant families in Bombay and Ahmedabad *chose* to adjust their domestic spaces, as well as their aesthetic and corporeal practices (dressing styles, choice of fabric, modes of transportation) according to European styles of consumption and tastes. I suggest that the ability to choose whether or not one wanted to accommodate Europe – “Europe” here being signified by an English education, English clothing styles, government jobs, and English consumption practices – informed and was indicative of class status in nineteenth century colonial Bombay.

In his memoir, *Shells from the Sands of Bombay* (1920), the Parsi writer and Elphinstone graduate, Dinshah E. Wacha, describes colonial Bombay in the years between 1860 and 1875. Apart from their business ventures, Wacha offers us a glimpse into the life-styles of the upper class elites, many of whom – including the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav families of Varjivandas Madhovdas and Mangaldas Nathubhai – lived in close proximity to each other in the Fort area of Bombay. According to Wacha, the homes of the affluent were furnished with Brussels carpets, large mirrors, Bohemian and Venetian chandeliers, musical clocks, glass globe-lamps (“the earliest foreign importation of luxury”), European toys for their children, and “a better style of picture decorations” (178-180). Though it is possible for us to gain access to the consumption and domestic practices of upper-class Puṣṭimārgīs today, it is difficult to extend Wacha’s description of such nineteenth century practices to the homes of Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs* as well.

While describing *baniyā* lifestyles several decades later, the 1901 *Bombay Presidency Gazetteer* illustrates how “Except young men in cities and large towns who are fond of tables, chairs, sofas, glassware and lamps, Vānias do not spend money on flimsy or breakable articles. Their practice is to have little furniture ... Their chief articles of furniture are strong wooden boxes cots and a large store of copper and brass pots” (75). The paucity of such historical evidence combined with the traditional view that orthodox *baniyās* were generally adverse to displaying their wealth so conspicuously, prevents us from drawing conclusions about the domestic environment of upper-class Puṣṭimārg families in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, we can assume that towards the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century urban elite *baniyās* began adopting more Western-inspired aesthetic and consumption practices. On the other hand, at least one aspect of the domestic space arrangement must have remained the same, namely, the space allocated for the performance of domestic ritual (the *pūjā* or *sevā* room/space). As we discussed in chapter one, we do have historical references indicating the practice of domestic ritual in Puṣṭimārg homes during the nineteenth century. In his study, *The Interiors of Empire*, Robin Jones corroborates this point further by demonstrating how visual representations of Indian middle-class homes from the nineteenth century seem to only consist of images of the *pūjā* room (145). Although most Hindu homes likely had spaces for the performance of worship, the nature of Puṣṭimārg *sevā*, in which Śrīnāthjī is regarded as a member of the family may have required that every Puṣṭimārg home have a space dedicated to the performance of daily worship. The existence, nature, and size of this space, whether it was a small corner in a room, or an entirely separate room within the home would depend on the economic background of a

household. As we will discuss in chapter five, domestic spaces became further implicated in the articulation and production of family status in the twentieth century through, for example, the size of the house, styles of furnishing, the types and value of commodities consumed and displayed in the home, et cetera. In a Puṣṭimārg context, the spaces dedicated to *sevā*, the articles used during *sevā*, and the amount of time dedicated to its performance also figured into this process of class display and status production.

A description of a Hindu *baniyā*'s home is related to us through the writings of Lady Nora Scott, the wife of the Chief Justice of Bombay in the 1850s, when she visited the home of the wealthy, reform-minded Mangaldas Nathubhai. Nathubhai, who would later go on to support Karsondas Mulji in his attack against Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, apparently lived “in a very grand, large house...enclosed in a high walled garden. The house is furnished in a half English style and portraits of the Queen and the Royal family hang on the walls” (qtd. in Jones, 134). This brings up another important point, namely, that the consumption practices of upper-class Indian elites did not necessarily conform to Anglo-Indian or Western elite practices. Class status in colonial India, by Indians, was articulated and produced through different forms of material culture, aesthetic choices, and cultural practices than Western modes of class production. This sometimes depended on the degree to which wealthy *śeṭhs* engaged with Europeans, were less orthodox with respect to their caste customs, or as we have seen with the example of Nathubhai, this was also influenced by their background as social and religious reformers. Many Parsis, moreover, would also only furnish *part* of their homes with Western décor so as to facilitate their social interactions with Europeans who visited them (Jones, 133).

In addition to domestic consumption practices, one of the ways through which the *baniyā* upper-classes of western India demonstrated and reproduced their elite status was through public displays of class, such as hosting lavish wedding celebrations,⁵⁸ the amount and quality of jewels they or their women would wear,⁵⁹ and also through donative practices – both religious and non-religious. Many of the religious donative practices by elite Puṣṭimārg families remain similar to those from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which have been discussed in chapter one). For example, wealthy Gujarati Puṣṭimārgis *śeṭhs* continued to host Gosvāmīs’ wedding and sacred-thread ceremonies, fund *havelī* construction or renovations, financially support the construction of *dharm-sālas* (pilgrimage “rest-houses”) and *go-sālas* (“cow sanctuaries”), organize pilgrimage tours, and donate money to Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* and their Gosvāmīs well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶⁰ Several Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs*, however, also engaged with more modern forms of *ābrū* production by donating funds to educational institutes

⁵⁸ The 1901 *Bombay Presidency Gazetteer* describes Gujarati *baniyās*’ spending-habits as follows: “... They are curiously thrifty in everyday life, but on special occasions they indulge in most lavish expenditure” (76-77).

⁵⁹ The *Bombay Gazetteer* notes how both *baniyā* men and women are fond of ornaments: “If fairly off a man’s every-day ornaments are silver girdle and a gold armband worn above the elbow; if he is rich he wears besides these a pearl earring, a gold or pearl necklace, and finger rings; if he is very rich he adds wristlets of solid gold. Costlier and more showy ornaments are worn at caste dinners and on other special occasions. A Vānia woman wears a gold-plated hair ornament called *chāk*, gold or pearl earrings, a gold and pearl nosering, gold necklaces, a gold armband worn above the left elbow, glass or gold bangles or wooden or ivory wristlets plated with gold *chudās*, silver anklets, and silver toe and finger rings. Indoors a Vānia woman wears earrings, a necklace, bangles or wristlets *chudās*, and anklets.” (1901, 76).

⁶⁰ *Śeṭh* Balabhai Damordas (b.1857) is said to have donated Rs. 80,000 to build a *dharm-sāla* in Mathura, called “Damordar Bhavan,” as well as one in Kankroli (“Mahakor Bhavan”), and in Vraj (“Kunj Bhavan”). He also served as the “chairperson” in the sacred thread ceremony of Gosvāmī Śrī Nathgopalji (Shah 1952, 105); *śeṭh* Achratlal Parikh (b. 1881) founded the “Vithal Niwas” *dharm-sāla* in Dakor, and donated funds for building a *go-sāla* (106); *śeṭh* Govindlal Maneklal (b.1886) built several *dharm-sālas* throughout his life, including one in the memory of his first wife in Kisangarh, and “Manek Bhavan” in Kota (108); and *śeṭh* Ishwarlal Chimanlal (b.1900) helped in renovating Ahmedabad’s Natvarlal Shyamlal *havelī*, and provided funding for rebuilding the Mathureshji *havelī* in Kota (112).

and hospitals.⁶¹ Material expressions of their devotion and sectarian identities also took on more modern forms. For example, *śeṭh* Balabhai Damordas (b.1858) was a member of the Gujarat Vaishya Sabha, a society which was founded by Ahmedabad's prominent Vaiṣṇav *baniyās* in 1903 (Shah 1952, 105-106). The Sabha provided a forum where *śeṭhs* could debate social and religious issues, such as education policies and caste taboos on foreign travel.⁶² *Śeṭh* Achratlal Parikh was elected as the president of the Gujarat Vaishya Sabha several times during his life, and he is also said to have participated in the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav Parishad (f. 1906) (106).

Print culture was another modern medium with which Puṣṭimārgīs engaged. Several *śeṭhs* either published their own Puṣṭimārg-themed works or provided translations of Puṣṭimārg texts and literature. For example, *śeṭh* Girdharlal Harilal (b.1855) published a book called *Līlā Prasāṅg* about his pilgrimage tour to Nathdwara (113). *Śeṭh* Balabhai Damordas financially supported Dwarkadas Parikh in publishing his well-known work on the Puṣṭimārg *vārtās*: *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* in the late 1940s (105-106). Lay *baniyās* such as Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai edited and published Puṣṭimārg performance literature, such as the *Dhol-Kīrtan Saṃgrah* (1913) and *Varś-utsav kīrtan saṃgrah* (1936). Finally, several prominent *śeṭhs* were also active members of *havelī* management committees. *Śeṭhs* Govindlal Maneklal (b.1886) and Chamanlal Girdharlal (b.1874) at one time even became presidents of the Śrīnāthjī Temple Committee (108-110). The engagement of *śeṭhs* with forms of print culture, and their

⁶¹ In addition to the education institutes mentioned earlier in this chapter, which several *śeṭhs* helped fund, *śeṭh* Achratlal Parikh (b.1881) established the “Saraswati ben” maternity facility in Ahmedabad, and *śeṭh* Keela Chand Devchand (b.1855) invested Rs. 1,25,000 in helping to build a maternity centre in Patan (Shah 1952, 106-110).

⁶² By 1905 a resolution was reached where traditional social sanctions on those who had crossed the seas were withdrawn (Yagnik and Sheth, 2011).

participation in caste and religious societies and *haveli* committees, all of which are informed by and helped perpetuate their sectarian identities as Puṣṭimārgīs, are also tied to the processes of class formation. As Joanne Waghorne argues, in the face of modernity, the reproduction of class begins to occur

“in modern sites and through modern media closely associated with the new economic realm. The contemporary home, volunteer service associations and religious groups, lecture series in private homes or public halls, private temples in or near homes, and small associations within public temples – all of these sites emerged in the context of modern urban life...” (138)

If we return to Wacha’s description of the upper-class merchant families in Bombay, we are provided with a glimpse of the activities of women from these families, albeit mostly of Parsi women. Wacha remarks how, during the hot summer evenings, one could find “the ‘burra beebies’ wives of officials and merchants, sipping their glasses of ices” outside shops selling ice and cakes – other luxury items of the 1850s (120). Though Wacha here only briefly describes the activities of women from the upper-classes, elsewhere he does go into more detail. For example, he relates how only women from poorer Hindu families would be seen wandering out into the markets of the city, while the only upper-class women to be seen were from the Parsi community (92). Interestingly, Wacha explains how it was during the 1858 Proclamation of Queen Victoria, marking the end of the EIC rule in India and the beginning of the British Rāj, and which drew thousands of people out onto the streets of Bombay that upper-class Parsi women were finally seen riding in open carriages for the first time, “attired in their rich silk saris and bejewelled” (170, 693). However, it would be the Divālī celebration of 1864 that Wacha attributes as having a real “social consequence” in Bombay. The social consequence was, according to him, represented by

“...the number of women of all classes, specially the Parsi, who turned out in their hundreds in the streets, either on foot or in open carriages! That was a phenomenon which was not allowed to pass unnoticed in the vernacular Press, notably the *Rast Goftar* – which was the special organ of the social reformers and founded by Mr. Dadabhoy Nowrojee and his friends ... Parsi women of the better class used to go about in their carriages, mostly shigrams with the venetian windows closed. They used to peep, like their purdah sisters, through the venetians. But the Diwali of 1864 changed it all. They went about driving in open carriages ...” (182-183).

While continuing to present Parsis as the most socially progressive community during this time, Wacha also describes the community as the only members of the upper-class who often socially intermingled with Europeans. Hindu and Muslim mercantile communities, who although kept cordial business relations with Europeans, only ever invited well-known Europeans to attend marriage ceremonies and “nautch parties” at their homes (683-84). Parsis, Wacha explains, free from “the trammels of caste and custom,” mixed openly with English society (ibid). Perhaps due to their already close business and social connections with Europeans, Parsis were also among the only members of the upper-classes who from the beginning sent their sons to Elphinstone College. Although they were a small community, their success was unparalleled in the fields of commerce and trade.⁶³ They owned vast amounts of land across Bombay, and were India’s leading ship owners. Many of the richest Parsi merchants, therefore, made large fortunes trading in cotton and silks with Europe and opium with China. As John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams demonstrate, during the nineteenth century, the Parsi community were not only participating in Bombay’s public culture through their business activities but they were also molding it through their pioneering work in education,

⁶³ The 1872 Census showed that Parsis constituted only 6.8 percent of the population (Dobbin 1972, 38).

philanthropy, medicine, journalism, and social reform (2). These were areas which the Hindu educated middle-classes would also soon come to dominate.

II. “The Educated Classes” and Making of the Middle-Class Intelligentsia

Christine Dobbin characterizes the intelligentsia of Bombay city in the mid-late nineteenth century as those individuals who received an English education at the Elphinstone College, Bombay University, and those who also graduated from professional institutions, such as the Grant Medical College and the Government Law Classes (1972, 28). As discussed above, although many *śeṭhs* were patrons of education, very few males from Hindu *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities attended these institutions. This may be due to the following reasons: (1) orthodox Hindus did not want their children exposed to Christian teachings at missionary schools; (2) they did not want their children mixing with children from poor families; and, (3) perhaps the most obvious reason is that wealthy merchants – at least in the early phases of colonial modernity – did not *need* to obtain an English education because of their already high economic status. Before the emergence of professional occupations, such as law and medicine, sons of merchants would earn more money if they continued in the same line of business as their families. On the other hand, students from poor Marathi and Gujarati Brahmin and lower caste families needed to obtain an English education to earn a better living and to eventually raise their economic status. Unlike the upper-classes such as the Gujarati *baniyās*, who for the most part were able to adapt to the new colonial economy, the emerging middle classes were wholly economically dependent on the colonial government. As Dobbin demonstrates, between 1827-1842 sixty-one percent of graduates

from the Elphinstone College entered government service positions as accountants, writers, or translators, and the next largest group, eight percent of the graduates, became teachers. Eventually, by the 1870s, teaching positions dominated the civil job market in Bombay city (39).

In the classrooms of Elphinstone, students were not only taught western sciences, such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry but they were also exposed to European literature and history, political theories, and philosophies.⁶⁴ The ethical, moral, and aesthetic education of Indians, along European and Christian lines, was disseminated through the teaching of English literature, a discipline that was ushered in with the 1835 English Education Act of William Bentinck. The writings of European authors like Shakespeare, John Locke, John Milton, Francis Bacon, and Samuel Johnson were presented as secular texts in institutions of Western learning even though their writings contained explicit Christian themes and references (Viswanathan 1989, 85-86). On the one hand, such a moral education was expected to generate an impulse for reform in students, which it perhaps helped catalyze in future reformers like Dadabhai Naoroji, Narmadshankar Lalshankar, Mahipatram Rupram, and Karsondas Mulji. On the other hand, the moral and ethical virtues supposedly imbibed by the English educated would also make graduates “useful” subjects for bureaucratic roles. As Gauri Viswanathan demonstrates, in 1844 Lord Hardinge, the Governor-General, passed a resolution assuring that those who acquired an education in English literature would be given preferential consideration for public office appointments (89). Eventually, the study and practice of

⁶⁴ Books on history included Thomas Macaulay's *History of England* and James Mill's *History of British India*; political economy and utilitarian thought included works by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Scott 132-133).

law was pushed as a suitable profession for educated Indians who wanted to see their moral education put to more practical use. The combination of an English literary education and law would ultimately render these individuals “good servants of the State and useful members of society.” (91).

It is difficult to provide distinct characteristics of the new middle class in the rapidly changing economic and socio-political context of nineteenth century Bombay. Unlike the propertied upper-classes whom were merchants and/or mill owners, that is, those who owned the means of production, the middle-class English educated public worked in government positions as teachers, clerks, translators, and eventually as lawyers and doctors – the new professional class. They can also be differentiated from the property-less lower classes, who worked as physical laborers (as mill workers or servants, for example). The middle-classes would also become the most politicized group in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a group of individuals who worked in the colonial government service, the middle classes frequently faced racial discrimination and thus were normally held back from attaining higher positions in legal and bureaucratic services. As a consequence, Rajat K. Ray argues, “their behavior was ambivalent, switching easily between collaboration and resistance: loyal servants of colonialism and leaders of the freedom struggle often came from the same families” (510).

Those members of the Western educated middle class who went on to pursue a degree in law or medicine eventually bridged the gap between the English-educated middle-class and the upper-class mercantile community. Lawyers, especially Indian judges in civil courts, received respect from both the European governing class and from

the Indian elite. During the 1870s-1880s, those students who graduated from Medical and Law colleges in Bombay began to amass considerable wealth, as well as receive social distinction. Although most students who continued in these fields of higher education again came from Brahmin and Parsi families, the links with the colonial government that lawyers appeared to experience, their social status, and the growing affluence of lawyers and doctors began to attract the attention of *śēths* as well. As a result, a few *śēths* soon began sending their children to England to study law in the 1860s (Dobbin 1972, 46). This new professional class came to represent the upper ranks of the intelligentsia. Their wealth demonstrated how it was possible for individuals with no connections to mercantile resources to attain an elevated status in society. As Dobbin explains, “by 1885 the gap between the city’s commercial magnates and the higher stratum of the intelligentsia was beginning to close, particularly in areas connected with status and importance to society” (172).

Thus, the middle-classes of the Bombay Presidency in the mid-late nineteenth century, much like today, were not a homogenous group. The class included English educated government workers and professional elites, the vernacular literati, as well as the intellectual classes – politicians, activists, reformers, revivalists, and so on. Many reformers of the time certainly were English educated (such as Karsondas Mulji, Mahipatram Rupram, and Narmadashankar Lalshankar), or had some connection to English officials (such as Dalpatram Dhayabhai did with Alexander Forbes). However, several reform-minded individuals did not attend any English institutes of higher learning (such as Durgaram Mehtaji, Dayananda Saraswati, and Bholanath Sarabhai). Christine Dobbin uses the term “intelligentsia” interchangeably with the Western educated middle

class, though I find Michelguglielmo Torri's use of "the intellectual class" to be a more suitable designation, especially for describing the group of reformers and revivalists who drew from various class, caste, and educational backgrounds. Drawing on the works of Antonio Gramsci, Torri demonstrates how the concept of "the intellectual" is a "sharper and more useful methodological tool" since it includes those individuals who are politically aware and active as theorists, strategists, and organizers and who hailed from both the Western educated classes and the vernacular literati (1990, 6)

Many of the leading intellectuals or reformers in nineteenth century Bombay, such as Dadabhai Naorji, Narmadashankar Lalshankar, Mahipatram Rupram, and Karsondas Mulji were educated at the Elphinstone College. Based on the 1850-51 Annual Report of the Elphinstone Institute, Christine Dobbin illustrates how students were required to compose English essays critiquing Indian "social problems," such as caste, early marriage, the status of widows, infanticide, and so on (53). The purpose of such an education was to inculcate students in the advantages of British rule, Western learning, and Western science and technology. As Viswanathan argues, however, the skill and success of English-learning institutions lay not only in the degree to which they compelled students to value Britain's civilizing presence in India but also how English education was redeployed as an

"...instrument of authenticity... Far from alienating the reader [student] from his own culture, background, and traditions, English literature, taught less as a branch of rhetoric than of history, sought to return him to an essential unity with himself and reinsert him into the course of development of civilized man." (1989, 141)

This point by Viswanathan perhaps helps to explain how social and religious reform movements, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth

century began reconstituting notions of improvement and progress along more “Indian”/Brahmanic lines. That is to say, even before social and religious reform movements collapsed with or fuelled twentieth century nationalist movements, social progress came to be defined in terms of a return to “authentic Indian” selves. This can be seen in Karsondas Mulji’s work as a social and religious reformer. As we discuss in the following chapter, Mulji, as Puṣṭimārg’s most vitriolic critic, often debated the authenticity of devotional traditions like Puṣṭimārg. He considered the sect obscene, not only by modern Western/Christian moral standards but also, ironically, because of its “modern” nature, as a tradition that did not originate in the Vedic age but only four hundred years ago. As B.N. Motiwala, the biographer of Karsondas Mulji, writes “Karsondas desired that his countrymen should aspire to have back the pristine glory of Hindu religion ... As properly understood and as originally propounded, Hinduism is not at all hostile to progress among its followers nor does it retard their national evolution” (1935). Although couched in the language of “authenticity,” reform efforts were structured along the lines of Western moralities and sensibilities.

Reform minded Elphinstonians, like Dadabhai Naoroji, Naoroji Furdunji, S.S. Bengali, and Bhau Daji helped establish the Students’ Literary and Scientific Society at the Elphinstone Institution in 1848 (Dobbin 1972, 55). At Society meetings members would share and listen to each other’s essays on topics ranging from the role of education and newspapers in society to the subject of metallurgy (56). Eventually the Society split along communal and linguistic lines, to form the Parsi centered Gujarati Gyan Prasarak Mandali, the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha, and, from 1851, the Gujarati Hindu Buddhi Vardhak Sabha. Each Society published its own journals, essays, and pamphlets on

social, scientific, and religious themes in their respective languages. The leading Elphinstone graduates, many of whom were Parsi, Marathi and Gujarati Brahmins (with the exception of one Hindu Gujarati *baniyā*, Karsondas Mulji) were active members of these Societies. At the same time, many of these men also realized that in addition to forming Societies and organizing meetings and lecture series, the most effective means of communicating their ideas to the general public was through the medium of the press.

From the 1830s to the 1860s, English-language newspapers were influenced by the Parsi *śeṭhs* who financially supported the enterprise. Parsis were also instrumental in establishing the Gujarati press in Bombay (Dobbin 1972, 54). Soon, however, graduates from English institutions began to work for presses as journalists with some even starting their own newspapers. One such newspaper was the *Rast Goftar*, the most popular and best-selling newspaper in late nineteenth century Bombay. The *Rast Goftar*, a Gujarati reformist paper, was founded in 1851 by the Parsi social reformer and Elphinstonian, Dadabhai Naoroji.⁶⁵ Although various presses of the city continued to draw on the financial support of wealthy *śeṭhs*, print culture in the form of journals, pamphlets, memoirs, and newspapers became the primary medium for the middle class intellectual community to publically voice their political concerns and reform ideologies. As we discuss in the next chapter, by the middle of the nineteenth century, many of these reform ideologies would come to center on the opulent lifestyles of *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā śeṭhs* and their sectarian affiliations with Puṣṭimārg.

⁶⁵ The paper was financially supported by the wealthy Parsi merchant, Kharshedji Nasarvanji Kama, and operated with the help of another leading Parsi reformer and fellow Elphinstonian, S.S. Bengali. Another Parsi, Naorji Khaikhosru Kabraji, was the editor of the paper for several decades (Dobbin, 1972 60).

Conclusion

This Chapter demonstrated how elite Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* communities were constitutive of the the upper-classes in the Bombay Presidency. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs* displayed their elite status by engaging in new forms of consumption practices and philanthropy, spending lavishly on wedding ceremonies, and constructing large bungalows in European styles. Material expressions of their devotion took the form of financing *havelī* renovations, building pilgrimage rest-houses, making public donations to Gosvāmīs and *havelīs*, sponsoring food-offerings, and so on.

Their opulent lifestyles and spending habits, however, would draw the criticism of the newly developing English educated middle-classes. What especially disturbed members of the reform-minded middle-classes is that while still wielding positions of power in civic administration, Hindu *śeṭh* families remained apathetic towards English learning and social reform. Reformers would eventually turn to print culture, especially newspapers, as a public forum for launching their ideological attacks on the wealthy *śeṭh* communities of the Bombay Presidency. In the minds of reformers, like Karsondas Mulji and Narmadashankar Lalshankar, the *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities' adherence to a sectarian tradition such as Puṣṭimārg as well as their relationship with the sect's leaders, the Gosvāmīs, marked the Puṣṭimārg *śeṭhs* as “backward” and illfit to hold positions of authority.

However, as the next chapter demonstrates, the reformist campaign against wealthy *śeṭhs* and Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs focused on the behavior of Puṣṭimārg lay women. The social and religious activities of Puṣṭimārg women became the sites upon

which middle-class moralities were mapped and debated by male reformers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By monitoring, sanitizing, and, eventually reconstituting Puṣṭimārg religious practices to the domestic sphere, the religious and gender reform movements of the period effectively cast Puṣṭimārg women as the producers of family status and respectability.

CHAPTER 3

Domesticating Puṣṭimārg: Middle-Class Modernities and Socio-Religious Reform

In the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class reformers launched an aggressive campaign against Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs and their wealthy mercantile followers. Reformers, such as Karsondas Mulji, saw *baniyā* patronage of Puṣṭimārg and the community's worship of Gosvāmīs as living incarnations of Kṛṣṇa to be the result of *baniyā* ignorance and lack of Western education. However, the most important and scandalous allegation put forth by reformers concerned the alleged sexual relations that existed between Gosvāmīs and their female disciples. These reformist campaigns culminated in the infamous Mahārāj Libel Case of 1862, in which the colonial court and Indian intellectuals debated the authenticity of a devotional sect like Puṣṭimārg as well the authority of its religious leaders, the Gosvāmīs, on grounds of morality, rationality, and Vedic authority.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the discourses surrounding the libel case indexed larger ideological concerns of nineteenth-century socio-religious movements, including the regulation of female sexuality, the promotion of female education, and the bifurcation and gendering of domestic and public spheres. Emerging middle-class moralities and sensibilities informed and were marked by the close connections being drawn between women's "proper" behavior, domesticity, and family respectability. I argue that reformist anxieties around Puṣṭimārg women's activities in *havelī* contexts, including their relationships with Gosvāmīs, promoted the Puṣṭimārg home as the principal site of women's religious practices. These debates, moreover, effectively

projected Puṣṭimārg women as the producers and performers of family status and of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity.

Nineteenth Century Social Reform and Puṣṭimārg's Fall from Grace

In the nineteenth century, print culture – in the form of journals, handbills, and newspapers – served as an important medium for disseminating reformist ideologies. The *Rast Gofar*, a Gujarati reformist newspaper that was founded in 1851, was primarily concerned with issues of social reform in the Bombay Presidency. Many of these social issues essentially revolved around the cultural and sexual lives of women, such as early marriage, the lack of female education, and the stigma against widow remarriage. The *Rast Gofar* along with other reformist papers like *Jagat Premi* and *Gnan Vardhak* also focused on the social and religious behavior of women, which included criticizing their excessive wearing of jewelry, their participation in public festivals like Holī, their “superstitious” practices, the singing of “obscene songs” at marriages, and the practice of chest-beating during mourning rituals (Sodhan 1997, 123). The editors and writers of the *Rast Gofar* felt that some of these “social evils” continued to persist in society because they had been adopted and practiced by the leading *śeṭh* families. Moreover, the conservative, uneducated *śeṭh* community was considered ill-fit to continue holding positions of authority and wielding so much power in the public sphere. According to the papers’ writers, it was time for the newly educated intelligentsia, the ideal citizens of the Presidency, to appropriate leadership positions from the *śeṭhs* and guide the population towards moral and political regeneration. From 1859-1865, the *Rast Gofar* began publishing an English column, which was edited by S.S. Bengali. The column dealt with

public questions and concerns, and also demonstrated the frustration of the English educated middle classes with regards to their status: “One party which, we believe, represents the greater part of the capital of this place, does not appear to be, as yet, wide awake to what is going on in the world; while the other (whose ranks we hope are increasing) is probably not yet in a material position to lead” (Dobbin 1972, 86).

According to reformist papers, the Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities epitomized the spectrum of social issues they were addressing. For example, many leading *śeṭhs*, like Gopaldas Madhavdas, the head of the entire *baniyā mahājan* in Bombay city, his brother, Varjivandas Madhavdas, and the *bhāṭiyā seṭh*, Damodhar Madhavji, were affluent upper-class merchants who did not show much interest in the new English education system and were members of an orthodox sectarian tradition, Puṣṭimārg. What disturbed reformers, especially, was the *śeṭhs*’ loyalty and “blind-faith” towards the leaders of the sect, the Gosvāmīs. The dynamic relationship that existed between the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, caste-guilds or *mahājans*, and the larger *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* community, appeared to be at the root of the community’s conservative and, therefore, “backward” status in the minds of reformers. Since most members of the *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* community in the Bombay Presidency belonged to the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy*, *śeṭhs* like the Madhavdas brothers had to demonstrate their explicit support of Gosvāmīs or else risk compromising their positions of leadership within the community. On the other hand, if members of the community appeared to breach caste or social customs, like travel overseas, marry a widow, or publically challenge Gosvāmīs – as Mulji and his associates did – the leading *śeṭhs* of the city’s *mahājans* had the power to

excommunicate members from the castes, at least until colonial legal interventions began to displace these traditional sites of authority.

In the late 1850s the leading reformers of western India focused on scrutinizing religious behavior they considered “superstitious and blind.” Their criticism eventually focused on the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy* and its leaders, the Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs. By the 1860s there were about four to five Mahārājs already residing in Bombay city.⁶⁶ As Amrita Shodhan demonstrates, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were criticized for “licentious, tyrannical, and immoral behavior” and were accused of abusing their religious authority by “giving arbitrary decisions regarding disputes within the families of devotees and for favoring rich devotees” (127). However, the most prominent and scandalous allegation put forth by reformers against the Gosvāmīs concerned their sexual promiscuity and their sexual exploitation of female devotees. The Gosvāmīs were publically criticized in vernacular and English newspapers and through the circulation of handbills for several years in the late 1850s. This public defamation culminated in the publication of an article by Karsondas Mulji in his Gujarati reformist paper, *Satya Prakas*, on October 21st 1860. In the article, entitled “The Primitive Religion of the Hindus and the Present Heterodox Opinions,” Mulji denounces Puṣṭimārg as heretical in light of Vedic authority. More importantly, Mulji accuses the Mahārājs of grossly manipulating the sect’s ideologies – especially the rite of initiation – by reportedly engaging in sexual relations with their female followers.

Karsondas Mulji, the Bombay Presidency’s leading Gujarati reformer in the 1850s, attended the Elphinstone Institute for six years, during which time he befriended

⁶⁶ The first Puṣṭimārg *haveli* in Bombay was opened in 1811 by Gokulnathji Mahārāj (Shodhan 2001, 120).

two Gujarati *nāgar* Brahmins, Narmadashankar Lalshankar (1833-86), the Gujarati poet, and Mahipatram Rupram (1830-1891), an important educationist and reformer (37).

Mulji was an active member of the Gujarati Hindu Buddhi Vardhak Sabha and wrote for the *Rast Gofar* before starting his own newspaper, the *Satya Prakas*, in 1855. More importantly, as a *kāpol baniyā*, Mulji also came from a Puṣṭimārg family. With the support of Narmadashankar, who knew Sanskrit and thus helped Mulji in reading the works of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, Mulji wrote articles, circulated pamphlets, and printed handbills targeting the Puṣṭimārg sect and its religious leaders. Narmadashanker also held meetings in his home to “expose the immorality of Vallabhacharyan doctrines, [and] to encourage devotees to ‘shun the society of such nasty persons as the Maharajas’” (*Times of India*, 22 Feb, qtd. in Dobbin 1972, 66).

In his article, Mulji mentioned one particular Mahārāja by name, Jadunathji Brijratanji Mahārāja from Surat. In a remarkable turn of events, Jadunathji turned to the British Courts for support to uphold the sect’s reputation and his own authority as its leader. He filed a suit for libel in the Bombay Supreme Court against Mulji and his printer (Dobbin 1972, 68). Fearing that he might be humiliated by his own disciples in court, Jadunathji sought the assistance of his most prominent devotees, the leading *śeṭh* of the Bombay *baniyā mahājan*, Gopaldas Madhavdas, and that of the *bhāṭiyā* community, Damodar Madhavji. On September 6 1861, Damodar convened a meeting of two thousand *bhāṭiyās* urging them to sign a bill assuring that they would not testify against the Mahārājs, and if they did, they would be excommunicated from the caste. Upon hearing about this document, Mulji charged the leading *śeṭhs* with conspiring to obstruct justice, a case he went on to win.

Soon after the “*bhāṭiyā* conspiracy case” was completed, the libel case (popularly called the Mahārāj Libel Case) commenced in the early months of 1862. As Amrita Shodhan demonstrates, the case became the “‘crowning glory’ of the Bombay reformists’ battle against traditional religious practices” (128). The British court and Mulji, along with his supporters, *śeṭhs* Gokaldas Tejpal, Mangaldas Nathubhai, and Lakhmidas Khimji focused on interrogating the authenticity of the Puṣṭimārg sect and the authority of Mahārājs as religious figures. The Judge and defense lawyers called upon witnesses, who were adherents of Puṣṭimārg, to comment on “questionable” moral teachings in the Brajhbhāṣā *vārtās* (Mahārāj Libel Case [MLC] 1911, 142-143), to testify whether or not they were well-versed in Sanskrit, and if they considered Gosvāmīs, their gurus, as representatives or incarnations of Kṛṣṇa (MLC 127-135). Throughout the trial the Gosvāmīs were repeatedly declared as not being authentic “preceptors of the ancient Hindu religion” (191).

The case was considered a victory for reformers and for the colonial courts on moral grounds. The verdict of Sir Joseph Arnould was published in vernacular and English newspapers for months after the trial concluded. In his final verdict he characterized Puṣṭimārgīs as a “weak and blinded people,” Mahārāj leadership as a “rapacious and libidinous priesthood,” and Kṛṣṇa as “a God whose most popular attributes are his feats of sexual prowess” (MLC 478-50). In addition to such Orientalist depictions, the discourses surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case echoed themes from earlier nineteenth century female reform movements, such as *sati* abolition. As Lata Mani has demonstrated in her study on *sati* (1998), what was ostensibly about women’s exploitation, the case instead became a site for debating “authentic” tradition,

“superstitious” beliefs, an emerging middle-class morality, and upper-caste patriarchal values. Throughout the trial, women are portrayed as passive objects whom were “defiled” or “enjoyed” by Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs. The voices of real women are never heard and if Puṣṭimārg women are commented upon they are portrayed, on the one hand, as succumbing to their “natural” immoral and passionate proclivities or, on the other hand, as infantilized “tender maidens.” Needless to say, the question of whether they *wanted* to engage in sexual relations with the Mahārājs was never discussed, and neither was female devotees’ willing participation in religious practices acknowledged outside the language of “immorality” or “blind faith.”⁶⁷ The reformers seemed to be disturbed by any ritual activities performed by women, at least *outside* the home, such as when women would swing the Gosvāmī during festivals (*hindolā*), visit their gurus in the *havelī*, participate in public Holī celebrations at the *havelī*, and sing songs (*garbās*) of *gopibhāva* (“erotic love”) about or to the Mahārājs (Shodhan 1992, 130-132). At one point, Mulji even published the names of several *baniyā* ladies who continued “in their shameless practices of singing indecent songs” (Motiwala, 180).

Before the libel case took place, on November 18, 1861 authors of the *Rast Gofar tatha Satya Prakas* (the two papers merged in 1860), including Mulji, called upon the men of the Puṣṭimārg community to uphold their family’s honor by controlling and regulating the actions of their wives and daughters:

“Hindus, we exhort you to educate your females, that you may have a virtuous progeny from a pure and uncontaminated source; for, under the circumstances ... a man cannot be sure that his child is his own...Divest

⁶⁷ In his final verdict, Sir Josepeh Arnould notes how “It was profligacy, it was vice ... The wives and daughters of these secretaries, (with their connivance in many cases if not with their approval), went willingly – went with offerings in their hands, eager to pay a high price for the privilege of being made one with Brahma by carnal copulation with the Maharaj, the living personification of Krishna” (430-431).

your females of the notion that intercourse with the Maharajas is an honour, and that amorous connection with them is bliss. Make them renounce this vile superstition. Claim them as your own only, and bind them to yourselves and your families by the strong and hallowed ties of conjugal, parental, and filial affection. Let not the homes have the scent of the impurities of the temple, whose odour should be disgusting to your nostrils.” (Motiwala 141-142)

As Shodhan reflects, reformers were more concerned and disturbed by the promiscuity of Mahārājs and Puṣṭimārg men’s wives and daughters than the sexual assault or rape of women; “The problem then, according to the reformers, was not sexual exploitation and harassment by the Maharajas but their corruption of ‘respectable’ women” (1997, 131-132).

From at least 1855 till the commencement of the Libel Case, reform-minded men from the *bhaṭiyā* and *baniyā* communities were vocalizing their concerns over interactions between Mahārājs and female devotees. Over the years, they made several recommendations to limit contact between female practitioners and Gosvāmīs, including how women should stop going to the *havelīs* for *darśan* in the early mornings and late evenings, and how female Gosvāmīs should be introduced into the sect to better supervise and manage the activities of lay women in the *havelī* (Sampat 1938, 408-416 qtd in Simpson 2008, 100). Before the Libel Case began, in 1861, the author of an article in the *Rast Goftar tatha Satya Prakas* also made suggestions to regulate the movement of lay women in the *havelīs*: “they should have *darshan* only from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., they should enter the *zenana* only to meet the Maharaj’s wife and daughters..., they should not be allowed to visit in the afternoon, and they should not be allowed to visit the Maharaj to offer him fruit in private” (Shodhan 1997, 133). According to Mulji, it was in the afternoons that female devotees would come visit the *havelī* in large numbers. Here,

female and male Puṣṭimārgīs “intermixed” during the *darśan* periods: “The crowd is so dense that, on extraordinary occasions, females are totally denuded of their slight and loose clothing in the crush. The practice, therefore, of permitting men and women to associate promiscuously in the room where the idol is worshipped is highly objectionable” (Mulji 1865, 104).

Most of the recommendations by reformers, including those by Mulji, called for the regulation, control, or complete prohibition of Puṣṭimārgī women’s religious activities in the *havelī*. The home and domestic spaces remained – or were now especially promoted – as the primary locus of Puṣṭimārg ritual practice. This reconstitution of the site of Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities from the *havelī* to the home is informed by and follows the ideological trajectory of domestic, gender, and religious reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The discourses surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case index the various issues raised in these movements, including the regulation of women’s sexual practices, the bifurcation and gendering of domestic and secular spheres, domestic morality, and the metonymic connections between home, woman, nation, and “authentic” tradition. These discourses, in turn, cannot be separated from the processes of class formation and status production. On the one hand, many of the “respectable” Puṣṭimārg women who were the subjects of such gender and religious reform likely came from the upper-class *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* mercantile families, while many of the reformers themselves came from the English educated and vernacular middle classes. As Sanjay Joshi argues, the Western educated middle-classes were consciously self-fashioning and articulating a unique identity in the late nineteenth century: “Using new institutions of the public sphere, these men were able to recast ideas of respectability

to distinguish themselves from upper and lower classes in society, and to posit a moral superiority over both” (xx, 2010).

In order to better contextualize Mulji’s critique of the relationship between Puṣṭīmārg Gosvāmīs and their female devotees, I now turn to a discussion of nineteenth century reform discourses surrounding women and domesticity in the Bombay Presidency. This enables us to understand some of the implications of the Mahārāj Libel Case on Puṣṭīmārg religiosity and on women’s domestic religious practices more broadly.

Domesticating Women: Nineteenth-Century Gender and Domestic Reform Movements

The Bombay Presidency constructed and deployed its strategies of reform along gendered lines. Upper-caste and middle class women’s actions – whether religious, domestic, public, or sexual – became sites for debating social progress, authentic Indian/Hindu identity, family prestige and status, and nationhood. In a volume entitled *The Status of Woman in India: A Hand-Book for Hindu Social Reformers* (1889), Dayaram Gidumal provides excerpts from symposiums and meetings held by each Presidency on reform issues such as infant marriage and “enforced widowhood.”⁶⁸ These constitute many of the reform debates leading up to the Age of Consent Act of 1891.

In the opening piece, *A Symposium of Hindu Domestic Reformers and Anti-Reformers*, Mr. P Desai criticizes early marriage because of what becomes of young mothers namely, inanely busy, superstitious housewives. He explains how, in Gujarat, Hindu families marry their daughters at the age of six or seven, and by twelve they have

⁶⁸ Dayaram Gidumal (1857-1927) served as an assistant judge in Ahmedabad, and was instrumental in founding the *Gujarat Hindu Sansarik Sudhara Samaj* (“The Gujarat Hindu Reform Society”) in 1888.

become mothers; “their life is then necessarily spent in looking after household affairs, and often in performing, in the higher classes, trivial religious duties” (xxii). Kumar P. Bhushan Deva describes his objections to infant marriage as follows: “Premature marriage is not only a pernicious custom because it ages wives at thirty, or gives us virgin or unhappy widows – but because it leads to the deterioration of the race. This was admitted even by the ancient medical science of the Hindus, the Ayur Vedas” (xxi). Other reformers share their concerns about the early onset of menstruation and how consummation of marriage should take place soon after puberty (xxiv-xxv). What appeared to be more of a concern for reformers was not so much the young age at which girls married but premature consummation by women and early pregnancy. Such debates reveal reformers’ anxieties around female sexuality and early pregnancy and its connection to child welfare, racial purity, and national health. For example, in the section on the Bombay Presidency deliberations on infant marriage, M.G. Ranade⁶⁹ proclaims how “...early marriage leads to early consummation, and thence to the physical deterioration of the race, and it sits as a heavy weight on our rising generation...[it] cools their love of study, checks enterprise, and generally dwarfs their growth” (14). Rao Bahadur Bholanath Sarabhai, the founder of the Ahmedabad Prathana Samaj, shares similar sentiments: “It is admitted by all enlightened Hindus that early marriages and unequal matches are mischievous. They believe that early union leads to the production of unhealthy families, and ultimately to the moral and intellectual deterioration of the whole race” (15). Early marriage, it was feared, could compromise the health of the offspring and, by extension, the larger community and nation. A secondary concern was

⁶⁹ Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) is the Marathi Brahmin political and social reformer who helped found the Indian National Congress and Indian National Social Conference.

that it also increased the probability of there being more child widows, many of whom were kept in a state of “enforced widowhood,” and were considered a material and social burden.

Throughout the late nineteenth century and leading into the twentieth century, reformist concerns with eugenics as well as national moral and physical health motivated the proper regulation and reform of middle class women’s bodies and activities in the “private” domain. This was attempted through managing the age of marriage and consummation, as we have seen, as well as by the introduction of proper hygiene practices and the scientific education of housewives (in the form of Domestic Science). The threat of miscegenation can be read into Mulji’s protest against the nature of Puṣṭimārgī women’s relationship with Gosvāmīs since, according to him, this would inevitably lead to sexual relations between the two. As cited above, Mulji exhorts men from the Puṣṭimārg community to uphold their families’ honor by ensuring “virtuous progeny from a pure and uncontaminated source,” that is, *not* by Gosvāmīs, and to prevent the contamination of the home with the impurities of the Puṣṭimārg *havelī* – embodied by the person of the Gosvāmī (Motiwala 141-142). This call for the reconstitution of women’s place in the home by reformers like Mulji marked the new links being forged between home, “authentic tradition,” and nation. The degree by which women could crystalize or rupture these connections, moreover, determined family prestige and status. As Karsondas Mulji reflects: “If you do not respect your own home, then how is it possible for you to increase your honour in the world? Woman constitutes your home and therefore, you ought to treat her with respect. Without such honour, our country’s status will never be high” (Motiwala, 237).

Early marriage also became tied to debates around women's education. According to Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912), the Parsi Gujarati reformer and journalist who helped mobilize the movement for increasing the age of consent, the marriage of young girls prevented many of them with the opportunity to acquire a proper education. Govardhanram Tripathi (1855-1907), the influential Gujarati reformer and intellect of the late nineteenth century, also shared this view and criticized child marriage because he felt the practice fostered female illiteracy (Shukla 1987, 69).⁷⁰ According to many such reformers, who most likely drew on Enlightenment themes of order, reason, and science, unmarried young girls and housewives also needed to be educated so that they could more efficiently, economically, and hygienically conduct their household affairs. Educated housewives, moreover, were not only considered more useful in the management of domesticity but they were also fashioned as intellectual and emotional companions who could support and share in their husbands' public and work aspirations. R.P. Karkaria, in his biography of Behramji Malabari, describes how rare it is for a man to find such a companion-wife:

“In the matter of marriage the life of the educated Indian of to-day has many and serious drawbacks. If he finds in his wife a loving partner of his worldly fortunes, a good manager of his domestic affairs and trainer of his children, he should consider himself happy... But if he seeks for an intelligent companion, on anything like terms of equality, with intellectual sympathy for his hopes and aspirations, a helpmate in his affairs beyond those of the household, he is in most cases doomed to disappointment. His life is in this way seriously handicapped, as compared with that of the European...”
(1896, 60-61)

⁷⁰ Govardhanram Tripathi engages with the theme of an educated Gujarati male in his writings, such as in the novel *Saraswatichandra*. Govardhanram insists that this modern male graduate needs an educated wife; “a wife who will manage his house skilfully, be his companion, stand by him in adversity, and always remain witty and cheerful. She will be his inspiration” (Shukla 1987, 63). According to Tridip Suhrud, Govardhanram, more than anyone else before Gandhi, shaped the “consciousness of the Gujarati educated middle class” (4).

The caricature of “wife-as-handicap” is echoed by B.N. Motiwala in his biography of Karsondas Mulji. Mulji’s wife is described as “a drag on all his public activities” since, on account of being “ignorant and illiterate,” she did not appreciate the public reform efforts of her husband. Instead, she often “cried, taunted, remained grief-stricken” when the family was excommunicated from the *kāpol* caste and the *baniyā mahājan* after Mulji’s journey to England in 1863 (1935, 200-205; 371).

In addition to constructing women as companion-housewives, reformers especially encouraged domestic reform and female education because of the supposed close and prolonged contact mothers had with their (male) children. In his *Essay on the Promotion of Domestic Reform* (1881), Elphinstone graduate, Ganpat Lakshman, argues for the education and “enlightenment” of women because of their central role in domestic management and in child rearing: “She has a greater authority over them than anyone else in the family...But it is often the case that she is uneducated. She has received no share of the mental enlightenment which is adequate enough to enable her really to appreciate the blessings of knowledge, and efficiently to discharge the important duties of her station” (54). At the same time the bifurcation of domestic and public spaces along gender lines was beginning to take place – and perhaps because of it – domesticity became a central theme in public discourses since domestic order was considered to be a blueprint for and precursor of social and national order. This relationship hinged on women’s roles as companionate wives, as efficient and competent home-makers, and especially in their roles as mothers. They were responsible for both producing and imparting moral knowledge to their (male) children – the nation’s future citizens. The

construction of an intimate mother- (or father and mother-) child relationship, moreover, is fairly novel since most middle-class families during this period lived in joint-families, where the up-bringing of children was a task shared by grandparents, in-laws, siblings, and even servants (Bannerji 11).⁷¹ This new, bourgeois patriarchy effectively reconstituted women as a mother *and* moral educator.⁷² The education of women unlike for men was indeed mobilized for different reasons: “whereas education for males was directly related to the pursuit of employment, female education had no economic function” (Borthwick, 61). Although deployed using the logic and language of reform and “emancipation,” the education of women aimed to instill “feminine” values in women, which would not make them into Western, more masculinized women as was feared, but into more *authentic* Hindu mothers and housewives.⁷³ It is clear from Ganpat Lakshman’s text on domestic reform, for example, that a young girl’s education was intended for her to become a more useful companion and a more competent housewife

⁷¹ In his text, *An Essay on the Promotion of Domestic Reform* (1881), Ganpat Lakshman discusses the condition of children in lower-class laborer families and describes their home-life as though there are no other family care-takers present. He notes how both the parents are absent during the day due to work: “The children are left to themselves without that control or superintendence which must needs be exercised over them, – they run about in the streets with all the wantonness of freedom. They are there exposed to the hurtful changes of the weather, their morals are there exposed to contamination; they there listen to the language of profaneness; they are confirmed in all the wildness of insubordination and disobedience, – and their whole character is tainted by practices which they ought never to know, and from which they ought ever carefully to be far removed” (76).

⁷² Throughout his text, Ganpat Lakshman, who is clearly drawing on Pietist/Lutheran and Enlightenment ideas of “rational” religion and morality, contends how, without an education, a mother cannot impart any relevant knowledge onto her children: “She is incapable from her own ignorance to pour into their minds wholesome lessons of piety and morality, and can therefore have no right conception of the manner in which their understanding might be improved, or the several powers of their mind be properly regulated and disciplined” (54).

⁷³ After describing Mulji as the “great emancipator of the Gujarati women,” Motiwala quotes Mulji’s description of an “ideal woman”: “Look at the picture of a woman who delights the heart of a man and who overpowers him by her pure love. Observe her traits. She walks gently, she speaks only sweet, melodious words. She is both mild and guileless. She neither sits idly nor wanders here and there. She puts on neat and clean clothes... By her good and amiable position her smiling face is suffused with love. From her lips only kind and affectionate words come out ... In all her work she uses her God-given intelligence and tries to remain honest and virtuous in all her deeds” (366).

and daughter-in-law: “Neither does she prove, such as she is, an easy and useful companion to her husband. She has received no education which could enable her to discharge with judgment and skill the most important duties of her husband’s family, or to assist him in any difficult part of his undertakings” (116-117).

In the Bombay Presidency, female education was initially launched by Christian missionaries in 1824 in Bombay city (Basu 67). From the 1840s several Parsi families, including those of Manockjee Cursetjee and Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, began educating their daughters in English at home. Cursetjee’s efforts would eventually culminate decades later in the opening of the first English school for “girls and ladies of the most respectable families,” the Alexandra Native Girls’ English Institution, in Bombay in 1863 (Chandra 2012, 35). Meanwhile, Parsi reformers and Elphinstone graduates like Dadabhai Naoroji and Kharshedji Nasarvanji Kama mobilized support to establish the Presidency’s first vernacular Parsi girls’ schools in 1849. By 1852, four schools had already been opened, where girls up to the age of twelve were learning to read and write Gujarati, as well as study themes in geography and natural history (Dobbin 1972, 57). Simultaneously, girls’ schools were also being established in cities like Surat and Ahmedabad. In Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Vernacular Society, with the financial help of Harkunvar Shethani (the widow of the millionaire Jain businessman Hutteesing Kesreesing), started the city’s first girls’ school in 1849.⁷⁴ In the same year, Maganlal

⁷⁴ Harkunvar also established an institution called the *Harkunvarba and Jyotiba Kanyashala* in Ahmedabad in 1855, where subjects such as history, geography, mathematics, Sanskrit, and Gujarati were taught. She also founded a teachers’ training college for women (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 126).

Karamchand also financed the construction of two more schools (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 124).⁷⁵

In all areas of the Presidency, the enrolment of girls from Hindu families was initially limited due to conservative ideas about women leaving the home, traditional taboos against female literacy, and the lack of female teachers. Despite this, it was families of upper-castes, like *nāgar* and *saraswat* Brahmins and Prabhus, whom were among the first to send their daughters to schools. Women from the Brahmin communities were also some of the first to train as teachers in the Mahalakshmi Female Training College in Ahmedabad (f. 1874) and the Barton Female Training College of Rajkot (f. 1885) (Mukta 1999, 32.) In accordance with their general attitude towards modern education, members of the wealthy Gujarati *baniyā* communities were apathetic towards the movement for female education. However, reformers like Naoroji knew that in order to build more schools, the financial support of the wealthy Gujarati *śeṭhs* was necessary. It was only after the government placed pressure and solicited the help of Gujarati *baniyās* that a few *śeṭhs*, such as the reform minded Mangaldas Nathubhai, came forward to support female education in Bombay city (Dobbin 1972, 58).

Female education in the Bombay Presidency always faced some form of resistance from the more conservative members of the population. However, it drew vociferous criticism in the early years of the 1850s when members of the Students' Literary and Scientific Society (formed by students of Elphinstone College) endorsed Erskine Perry's proposal for involving European ladies in the education of young girls. This was viewed by many as a method for introducing the teaching of English to Indian

⁷⁵ In Gujarat specifically, by the end of 1859, nine schools for girls were established: three in Ahmedabad, two in Surat, and one each in Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Limadi, and Gondal (Raval 51).

girls. Shefali Chandra, in her examination of the gendered transmission of English in school curricula, notes how Gujarati newspapers in Bombay voiced their objection to the introduction of English because of the perceived threat it posed to conjugal or domestic ties: “The outburst of the *Chabuk* shows the already entrenched fear that educated women would have the power to invoke legal procedures to shun their husbands’ authority and initiate separation; educated women would repudiate the marital bond” (2012, 43). Years after the Alexandra Institution was opened, the Anglo-Marathi weekly paper, *Native Opinion*, opposed the introduction of English in girls’ schools as well. It had already claimed that English in boys’ schools made these institutions “anglicized, classicalized, and thus denationalized,” and by introducing the language to girls, it could “only lead to the transplanting in India of the manners and customs of another society” (Dobbin 1972, 77). English, as a language that could potentially be spoken by women (mothers) at home – as a new “mother tongue” – only appeared threatening because of the metonymic connections being forged between woman, home, tradition, and nation in the nineteenth century. Women were reimagined as the custodians of authentic Hindu/Indian culture. The resistance to teaching English to young girls and women is symptomatic of this gendered bifurcation of public and domestic spheres. The home, which was increasingly being constructed and politicized as the site of social, cultural, and national reproduction, needed to be protected by western influences and forms of cultural miscegenation – here embodied by Indian women speaking English.

For reformers, the English education of Indian girls appeared encouraging because it was institutionalized through a specific pedagogical logic, one based on ideal (Victorian) femininity. In schools like the Alexandra Institute, where girls learned

arithmetic, geography, English, and vernacular languages, they also learned needlework, music, and singing (Chandra 2005, 67). The education of girls was not expected to compromise their femininity; instead, it ensured domestic bliss by molding women into more companionate spouses and useful housewives. However, reformers also had reservations about female education due to the lack of female teachers and, when in 1883, a proposal was made to increase the maximum age until which girls may attend schools (Chandra 2012, 48). The threat of a young woman or housewife becoming too “independent-minded” always loomed in reformers’ debates on the age of marriage and consent and female education. In the Bombay Presidency deliberations, included in Gidumal’s *Status of Woman in India* (1889), Bhaskarrao Balkrishnaji Pitale and Nana Moroba expressed their concerns about how early marriage – but not necessarily child marriage – preserved the harmony of a joint-family:

A woman introduced into the family at the age of about twenty, will not easily yield to the orders, wishes, whims and caprices of the old ladies of the family. She will have no sympathy for them, nor will they have any for her, while a young girl at the age of 12 or so, introduced into the family will soon be attached to it. Sympathy for each other will reciprocally be generated in both. On the other hand, in the case of a woman, the chances of a rupture are imminent. This will entail dismemberment of the family and of the family estate. (10)

Women, in their roles as housewives and daughter-in-laws, were considered to be the preservers of traditional practices like the joint-family.⁷⁶ For both reformers and conservatives, increasing the age at which women could marry or enter school presented a possibility for young girls and housewives to disrupt domestic harmony by becoming

⁷⁶ Much like the caste system, European sociologists and anthropologists as well as urban high-caste Indian reformers and nationalists, saw the “joint-family” as a vestige of India’s ancient patriarchal societies (Uberoi 1994, 31-32). The joint-family system was constructed as a marker of India’s “traditional” values in contrast to the individualism which characterized the values of Western societies.

“too independent” or “too educated.” Domestic harmony is here explicitly characterized with the degree to which family elders, in-laws, and husbands are able to wield authority over their new wife/daughter-in-law. Manilal Nathubhai Dwivedi (1858-1898), a *nāgar* Brahmin from Nadiad – who was a Sanskrit scholar, Vedantist and an Elphinstone fellow – was concerned with the impact of Western education in India precisely because it appeared to threaten India’s primary social unit: the family. In a series of articles on “The East and the West,” he lamented on how this new education, which seemed to transfix reformers, encouraged “ego-centric individualism...materialism...and licentiousness” (Rawal 200). Modernity, Manilal argued, should not be pursued at the cost of losing tradition; “The Indian tradition gave more importance to the collective social life as represented by a joint family system; while the Western tradition encouraged individualism at the cost of family life” (ibid). According to Manilal, “modernity” and “tradition” could be made compatible, if modernity was the result of tradition. Taking the education of Indian women as an example, he felt that if a woman was “rightly educated” – with an emphasis on morality – she would be instilled with such noble virtues that she would not want to marry again in the event that she became a widow (200).

Govardhanram Tripathi was also concerned with the rapid modernization and westernization he saw occurring around him. Like Manilal Nathubhai, Govardhanram valued the joint-family system, which he believed was disintegrating into nuclear family units under the reformist and nationalist rhetoric of “rationalism and individual freedom” (217). In this context, the tipping-point for when one became “too modern” was determined by a woman’s ability to negotiate modernity – here marked by an English education – and “traditional values,” represented by the joint-family system. Nineteenth

century reform debates thus ushered in a new patriarchy: “‘new’ because it challenged indigenous patriarchal traditions by allowing women’s literacy and education, and by encouraging them to travel outside the home; but ‘patriarchy’ because it maintained women in a dependent and subordinate status within Indian society” (Chatterjee 1993; Walsh 2004, 3-4).

In addition to educational institutes, for women who learned to read, printed works in various genres and forms including manuals, journals, magazines, and advice columns became the primary medium through which women were exposed to nineteenth century ideas of domesticity.⁷⁷ In Bengal, for example, between 1860-1910 close to eighty manuals, magazines, and journals were published for women on themes such as women’s family relations, home management, proper hygiene practices, cooking, and account keeping (Walsh 22). Similar works were published throughout the subcontinent in Hindi (Orsini 1999; Dalmia 1997), Urdu, Telugu (Ramakrishna, 1991), and Gujarati (Shukla 1991), et cetera. In fact, it was in the Bombay Presidency that the first journal for women, *Stribodh* (“Women’s Enlightenment” or “Advice to Women”), was launched in 1857 and continued until 1950 (Shukla 1991, 63).

Stribodh was established and supported by Bombay city’s leading Parsi and Hindu social reformers of the time, including Sorabji S. Bengali, Khaikhosru Naoroji Kabraji, and Karsondas Mulji. Mulji was one of the journal’s earliest editors; he edited *Stribodh* from April 1859 to May 1861 and wrote in twenty-two editions during which time the journal had only about one thousand subscribers (Motiwalla 304). After Mulji,

⁷⁷ School enrolment statistics from the late nineteenth century can help illustrate what may have been female literacy rates in the Bombay Presidency during this period. Though, of course, women could have learned to read outside educational institutes. From 1881-82, there appeared to have been 16,766 girls in schools throughout the Presidency, and this number rose to 187,265 by 1921-22 (Basu 71).

Kabraji became the journal's chief editor for many decades, and after he passed away in the early 1900s, his daughter and daughter-in-law edited *Stribodh* (Shukla 1991, 66). The journal included articles on geography, scientific inventions, history, fictional stories, as well as *garbā* songs by the celebrated Gujarati poet and reformer, Dalpatram Dhayabhai. By the 1880s more than half of the journal was dedicated to serialized novels, adapted from European classics, in favor of the more informative pieces (64). As Sonal Shukla explains, these didactic narratives "always carried morals against greed, disloyalty, vanity, pride, laziness, and superstition" (63). Although the journal was founded, promoted, and patronized by social reformers, many of whom championed the cause of widow remarriage, for example, disseminating ideas of proper domesticity and ideal womanhood was the central preoccupation of the journal's writers. This, according to Shukla, is made evident by the lack of articles addressing some of the contemporaneous social reform and political activities of the late nineteenth century, such as Behramji Malbari's efforts to raise the age of consent, the remarriage of the first higher caste Gujarati Hindu widow (Dhankorbai with Madhavdas Raghunathdas), and the Mahārāj Libel Case (64-65).

Stribodh was initially directed towards an upper-middle class, urban, Parsi female audience. However, because it was published in Gujarati, literate Hindu and Muslim females from more modernizing families in western India also read it (64). The journal's chief aim was to disseminate advice to women on how to become more productive, economical, and docile housewives and mothers in emulation of Victorian-

styled domesticity.⁷⁸ Instructional material on sewing, knitting, ‘chikkan’ embroidery, and drawing was included so that women from rich families “can spend their leisure hours pleasantly and creatively and poor women can add to their families’ incomes in a decent and respectable way” (63). Women were encouraged to wear shoes and socks while traveling outdoors, to not shy away from accompanying their husband to social gatherings, and to cease wasting time idly gossiping with other women and performing lengthy and complicated rituals. The journal also ran a series called “Governor of The House,” in which women were advised on how to purchase and arrange furniture for their homes, hire servants, and utilize western-styled utensils (65).

Although the domestic education of Indian women followed Victorian models, their over-westernization was at the same time also a concern for Gujarati reformers and cultural revivalists like Govardhanram Tripathi, Karsondas Mulji, and Nathubhai Dwivedi. These anxieties would eventually culminate in the nationalist resolution of the “woman’s question,” which constructed middle-class Indian women as different from, and morally superior to, both Indian men and western women (Chatterjee 1989). Mulji, who was a champion of colonial interventions in India, resisted the total adoption of western practices by Indian women. For example, on the one hand, Mulji insisted that women should not put heavy ornaments on their legs and wrists and should begin wearing stockings, slippers, or shoes. On the other hand, he very much liked the “custom

⁷⁸ Sonal Shukla, in her examination of the *Stribodh* journal, summarizes the journal’s advice on how one can become a good housewife: “(i) Arrange the house neatly and aesthetically. (ii) Keep the children neat and disciplined. (iii) Do not shout at children or beat them. (iv) Dress in nice clothes, especially to receive him when he returns home in the evening. (v) Manage the servants well but do not mix with them. (vi) Never sit idle. (vii) Do not sit with other women to gossip and make idle talk. (viii) Do not complain to your husband about problems in household management. (ix) Sing or play a musical instrument to help your husband relax when he returns home. (x) Speak to him in a soft and pleasant manner. (xi) Do not ever nag him” (1991, 65).

of our women putting on silk sarees” (Motiwala 238). He also called upon women from the higher classes to imitate the philanthropic activities of English ladies, and to perform all housekeeping activities. Yet, he denounced the aesthetic practices of wearing tight bodices, artificial hair, and applying face powder like English women: “Women should show only the natural beauty they possess” (239). It was important for reformers and cultural revivalists/nationalists to demonstrate the inherent, natural beauty, virtue, and morality of Indian women over and above western women. This “new Indian woman,” moreover, was not to be a product of Victorian ventriloquism but she was modeled after an imagined upper-caste female archetype in India’s ancient past when women were supposedly educated (in Sanskrit) and were more spiritually grounded. Interestingly, at the same time, and very often by the same reformers and revivalists, the authenticity of Indian culture and religious traditions was also being located in a golden, Vedic age. Thus, both the golden age of Indian womanhood and that of upper-caste Hinduism were located in the same imagined past. It comes as no surprise then that late nineteenth and early twentieth century cultural revivalists and nationalists began to couch their constructions of ideal womanhood in the *śāstric* language of *pativrata* (“devoted wife”) and *strī-dharma* (“women’s duty”), cementing the connections between ideal middleclass womanhood and “authentic” upper-caste patriarchal Indian tradition.

The Domestication of Puṣṭimārg Women’s Religious Practices

Returning to Mulji’s critique of Puṣṭimārg, it is his construction of woman as custodian of tradition and imparter of morality, as well as the heuristic reading of religion

through the language of morality that fueled Mulji's attack on the sect.⁷⁹ Puṣṭimārg, according to Mulji, was a tradition that was incompatible with the civilized, Enlightenment virtues of morality and reason: "It must astonish every one that such debasing practices should proceed from the religious code of intelligent, if not educated, persons; and those who are accustomed to think and to test everything by reason and common sense, can scarcely believe that such fanaticism can exist in an enlightened age" (1865, 123). For Mulji, the most corrupt and superstitious aspect of the tradition was that Gosvāmīs identified themselves as incarnations of Kṛṣṇa and that female devotees legitimized this by worshiping Gosvāmīs as deities and – allegedly – engaging in sexual relations with them. Mulji describes women as already inherently virtuous and blames Gosvāmīs for "ruining the morals" of Puṣṭimārg women whom, because of their lack of education, were blindly following their gurus: "although woman, normally, has perhaps a keener perception of right and wrong than man, her intelligence is enfeebled by the want of education and enlightened society" (128). Gosvāmīs, on the other hand, were repeatedly described as over-sexed promiscuous men, who were "addicted to the society of loose and light life" (MLC 55-56), as hosting "nautch" dances in the *havelīs* (128) and indulging in all sorts of "blasphemous adultery and sacrilegious pleasures" (159).

Mulji disapproved of female devotees visiting their gurus in private, participating in public Holī festivals at the *havelī*, and singing "lascivious poetry" to Gosvāmīs (109). During a testimony in the libel case, a supporter of Mulji, Mathooradas Lowjee, described what he thought were the motivations behind women singing these

⁷⁹ Most likely drawing on Enlightenment and Protestant themes Mulji insists on the importance of both religion and morality: "A man as much needs to worship God as he needs to be moral; and just as you need to be moral, so also equally you need to worship God. A man does not get salvation unless he has both religion and morality" (Motiwala 327).

devotional songs (*garbās*): “Licentious songs are sung by females on occasions of marriage; but when they are addressed to the Maharajas, the females singing them wish for carnal intercourse with them [the Maharajas]” (MLC 277-283). Lowjee exclaimed that “If the Bhattias of Bombay were educated at all, such adulteries would not prevail amongst them” (Motiwala 283). Thus, according to Mulji and his fellow reformers, the lack of education among members of the mercantile community – and especially among their women – was responsible for the irrational beliefs held by Puṣṭimārgīs with regards to their gurus (157). Mulji insisted that Puṣṭimārg women needed to reevaluate their relationship with Gosvāmīs, to no longer view them as embodiments of divinity and to cease having immoral relations with them. In January 25, 1857 Mulji even placed a call in the *Satya Prakas* for someone to write an essay on “what out to be the ideal moral relation between spiritual guides and their votaries, specially female ones?” (100).⁸⁰

On the one hand, it is clear on many accounts that Mulji objected to the overall legitimacy of the Puṣṭimārg tradition. On the other hand, while Mulji reproached the ways in which female practitioners approached their gurus and conducted themselves in public spaces, he did not explicitly call for the complete abandonment of sectarian ties with Puṣṭimārg, nor did he break from the tradition himself. Much like his discourses surrounding gender reform, Mulji’s personal religious views and relationship to Puṣṭimārg were contradictory at times, and ambiguous at best. For example, Mulji is remembered as a great advocate of widow remarriage in the Bombay Presidency; however, he married three times but never to a widow. Even when the wife of his close friend *śeṭh* Madhavdas Rughnathdas, passed away, Mulji advised him to marry “a virgin”

⁸⁰ His friend, and fellow Elphinstone graduate, Narmadashankar is said to have written the best piece (Motiwala 100).

(207).⁸¹ Similarly, although he was Puṣṭimārg's most vitriolic critic, he still initiated his daughter into the sect and accepted his own guru as a spiritual guide. As Mulji states, "Jeevanji is still my Guru, but I have stopped visiting him. I look upon the Maharajas as spiritual guides, not as Gods... I have a daughter round whose neck I put a "Kanthee" myself, according to the ceremonial forms of my sect" (258).

Mulji's views on the reformation of Puṣṭimārg are intimately linked to his ideologies on gender and domestic reform as well as his positivist view of colonial modernity. His campaign can be further circumscribed within the larger gender reform discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which we have discussed above. At the same time that the home was being reconstituted as the site of authentic tradition, women's bodies and corporeal practices (sexual, religious) became closely aligned with domestic spaces and the production and articulation of proper domesticity. Any threat on women's propriety or honor (*ābrū*) could jeopardize domestic and familial dignity and status. Efforts to reform the relationship between Puṣṭimārg women and Gosvāmīs, which involved positioning the home as the principal site of female Puṣṭimārg religiosity, casts women as the primary performers, producers, and pedagogues of Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity.

Instances where Puṣṭimārg women do not remain silent observers or passive recipients of reformist activities further demonstrate the vital role of female practitioners in the maintenance and articulation of Puṣṭimārg religious identity and culture. For example, in 1858, a few years before the libel case, the Mahārājs in Bombay allegedly

⁸¹ It was in fact Madhavdas who insisted that he wanted to marry a widow, which he did in 1871. Her name was Dhankore *bāī*, and she was the niece of *śeṭh* Varjiwandas Madhavdas. This was the first upper-caste or *baniyā* widow marriage in the community and they were subsequently ex-communicated by the *baniyā mahājan* (Motiwala 207-217).

compelled the editor of the newspaper *Chabuk* to publish articles discrediting the reformers, Gokaldas Tejpal and Lakhmidas Khimji. The *Chabuk* then printed these pieces on three separate occasions during September and October of 1858. Lakhmidas Khimji filed a suit for defamation against the editor of the paper, who was then requested to subpoena one of the Mahārājs, Jivanlalji, as a witness. In an effort to avoid appearing in court, Jivanlalji closed the doors to his *havelī*, preventing Puṣṭimārgīs from performing *darśan* for one week. Many of his followers, who felt that they could not consume their food without offering it to the *svarūps* in the *havelīs*, voiced their disapproval (Motiwala 101). In protest, women from the Puṣṭimārg community allegedly took to the streets, and “showered volleys of abuses on the reformers” (ibid). Amrita Shodhan notes how these women also symbolically mourned the social deaths of reformers as part of their public demonstrations (1997, 131). The Mahārājs declined to reopen their *havelīs* until all Vaiṣṇavs signed a document pledging to never summon a Gosvāmī to court or write defamatory articles about them. Motiwala explains how the women from these communities were ultimately responsible for convincing the men from their families, which included rich *śeṭhs*, Justices of the Peace, and members of the Grand Jury, to sign the document (186). Ironically, for Mulji and his supporters, the very women who were the subjects of their reform resisted attempts made to disrupt their religious practices.

Sanskritization and the Defense of Tradition

In addition to questioning the relationship between Gosvāmīs and female practitioners, reformers targeting the Puṣṭimārg community attempted, more generally, to subvert the authority of Gosvāmīs as leaders of the sect. Mulji in his book, *History of the*

Sect of Vallabhacharyas (1865), demonstrates how Gujarati writers before him illustrated the “profligacy of the Maharajs” in their works. He refers to a Sanskrit drama, *Pākhaṇḍa Dharma Khaṇḍan* (“The Smashing of Heretical Religion”) from the year 1639 in which the writer, Dāmodar Svāmī, ridicules the founder of Puṣṭimārg, Vallabhācārya (1865, 133-134). He cites excerpts from eighteenth and nineteenth century Gujarati poets, such as Śyāmal Bhaṭṭa, Akha Bhagat, and Krsnaram, who criticize the lavish lifestyles and licentious behavior of Gosvāmīs (134-137). He also provides English language material from the “Transactions of the Literacy Society of Bombay,” which describes one of the chief Mahārājs of the time as “a man worn to a skeleton and shaking like a leaf, from debauchery of every kind” (138). Finally, Mulji offers the full testimony from the Mahārāj Libel Case of one of the Bombay Asiatic Society presidents, Dr. John Wilson, a missionary who is treated as an authority on the sect by the British court. In great Orientalist fashion, Wilson denounces the Puṣṭimārg tradition as the “way of enjoyment, in a natural and carnal sense” (141).

During the Mahārāj Libel Case, several witnesses were asked whether or not they considered Gosvāmīs incarnations of Kṛṣṇa. In the opening days of the trial, the head of the *baniyā mahājan*, Gopaldas Madhavdas appeared perplexed by this line of questioning. On the one hand, he denies ever hearing any *baniyās* regarding their gurus as “almighty God incarnate in the flesh” (MLC 127). On the other hand, he does go on to admit how “some people do say that they are gods, while some deny that they are” and how Gosvāmīs “deserve to be worshipped with the mind, property and body of their followers” (127-128). Another witness, Jumnadass Sevaklal, was threatened with a fine and jail time if he did not answer the question to the satisfaction of the judge. The

following line of questioning between Mulji’s lawyer, the judge, and the witness dramatizes the discourse of “priestly imposture,” which informed both British and reformist opinions of Puṣṭimārg (Scott 126):

Mr. Anstey. Do some Baniyas believe the Maharaj to be a God ?

Witness: We consider him to be our gooroo.

[Judge] Sir M. Sausse: Tell witness if he does not answer the question, he will be sent to jail.

....

Witness: Some consider the Maharaja god in the shape of gooroo.

Mr. Anstey: Is Gooroo a God?

Witness: Gooroo is gooroo.

Sir M. Sausse: Tell him if he does not answer the question, most indubitably will he go to jail.

[Judge] Sir Joseph Arnould: Tell him he is asked what others believe, not as to his own belief.

Witness: I don't know if others believe him as God; I consider him as simply a gooroo. I don't know under what name others worship him. (MLC 134-135)

Similarly, even when Gosvāmī Jadunathji Mahārāj himself was cross-examined during the trial (February 25th, 1862), he denied the claim that Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, other than Vallabhācārya, are worshipped as deities: “I have not heard any one say that we are worshipped as gods... The devotees regard us as Gurus, as guides to God” (344).

The British court not only interrogated the alleged divine status of Gosvāmīs but also questioned their authority as religious leaders. Since Mulji himself argued for the heterodox nature of Puṣṭimārg, in light of its “modern” formation, his lawyers insisted that Puṣṭimārg Mahārājs are not authentic leaders: “...the persons called Maharajas, most improperly so called, are not the preceptors of religion...The sect of the Vallabhacharyas is a contemptible sect of 500 years old, and not an ancient ruling sect, as the plaintiff has averred” (MLC 147). If the tradition itself is not considered authentic, only because it is not “ancient,” its leadership is also delegitimized on similar grounds. It is not surprising

that the only form of Hinduism that both the British court and Indian reformers accepted as being authoritative was Sanskritic/Brahmanic Hinduism, which emphasized Vedic authority and the values of chastity and asceticism. Jadunathji Mahārāj and his supporters defended their sectarian position against this Orientalist and reformist attack, even in the years leading up to the trial, by promoting Sanskrit literature and learning in favor of Puṣṭimārg vernacular textual sources (such as the Brajbhāṣā hagiographies or commentaries by Puṣṭimārg theologians), and also by deemphasizing the explicit, erotic *gopī bhāv* that permeates Puṣṭimārg religiosity.

Jadunathji, although he later became the fulcrum of the libel trial, was respected by Mulji and his fellow reformers. This is because he appeared sympathetic to the cause of social reform, which he demonstrated by opening a girl’s school in Surat. He was even invited to preside over the prize distribution at *śeṭh* Mangaldas Nathubhai’s school for girls in Bombay in 1860 (Motiwala 30). His father, Brajratnaji Mahārāj, frequently discussed the need to eradicate superstitious or “magic” practices in Gujarat with reformers like Durgaram Mehtaji, the founder of the *Manav Dharma Sabha* in Surat (Shodhan 2001, 121). However, soon the relationship between Jadunathji and the reformer community grew tense when newspapers like the *Satya Prakas* and *Rast Gofar* zealously began maligning the Puṣṭimārg sect in their articles. Jadunathji responded by starting his own publications: a journal called *Vaisnav Punch* (“Arbitrators for Vaiṣṇavism”) and *Swadharmā Vardhak ane Sanshaya Chhedak* (“Propagator of our Religion and Destroyer of Doubt”), in which, according to Mulji’s biographer, “reformers were styled as fools, rogues, atheists, etc.” (31). Jadunathji also established a

“Society for the Propagation of Vaiṣṇav Dharma” (*Vaiṣṇava Dharma Prasarakā Sabha*) and released handbills on themes related to Puṣṭimārg (Shodhan 1995, 158).

Joshua Barton Scott (2009), in his study on the representation of Mahārājs in the libel case, demonstrates how in the early issues of the *Swadharmā Vardhak* (in the early 1860s), Jadunathji attempts to disassociate Puṣṭimārg *bhakti* from any erotic themes. In Puṣṭimārg, Jadunathji insists, *bhakti* is characterized by *sākhya bhāv* (“friendship”) and *vātsalya bhāv* (“parental love”). He rejects those who claim that the erotic love of the *gopīs* for Kṛṣṇa (*mādhurya, jār bhāv*) is paramount in Puṣṭimārg; “To love God adulterously is, he assures his reader, a sin” (155). *Gopīs*, Jadunathji explains, are merely *avatārs* of Parvati or Sita, who have come to be reunited with their husbands, Śiva or Rām, respectively. Thus, in his publications, the love of the *gopīs* is likened to or reduced to marital love. A few years later, during the libel case, Jadunathji appears ambivalent about the place of *mādhurya bhāv* in Puṣṭimārg *bhakti*. On the one hand he appears to vehemently dismiss any claims made to the erotic or “adulterine” love of the *gopīs*; ⁸² elsewhere he acknowledges how the love expressed by the *gopīs* is exemplary of the highest devotion: “Adulterine passion is intense love, and the same intensity of love should be shown towards God. Such love towards God is very good... Such an illustration is given in the Bhagwat” (MLC 361).

Jadunath Mahārāj had to repeatedly legitimize his theological claims by making reference to textual sources, like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. And although this

⁸² When Jadunathji is cross-examined by Mr. Anstey on February 27th, 1862 he replies to a question on the portrayal of *gopīs* in Vaiṣṇav texts by stating: “I cannot say whether it is the belief of my sect or not that, the *gopees* loved God as their paramour and that God loved them and made them happy” (MLC 349). He reiterates this point later: “I have not observed in any book if it is the doctrine of my sect, that true Vaishnavas, after death, become *gopees* and have amorous and improper intercourse with God. I do not believe in this doctrine, nor am I aware if any of my followers does or do believe in it” (352).

Purāṇa is a Sanskrit text, for the most part only select texts, such as the Vedas, the *Manusmṛti*, and the *Gītā*, were considered authoritative of “authentic” Hindu tradition by both the reformer community and the British court. Throughout the trial both “modern” or vernacular texts, like the Brajbhāṣa *vārtās* and commentaries of Puṣṭimārg theologians were not accepted as representative of “true” Hinduism. John Wilson, in his testimony in the libel case, explains how “It is an historical fact, that the more modern religions are less moral and less pure” (254). Thus, throughout the trial, the more “ancient” a (textual) tradition was determined to be, the more moral and rational it was considered. In many ways, Jadunathji Mahārāj could only defend Puṣṭimārg as an authentic, *moral* Hindu tradition by turning to and invoking Vedic Sanskrit authority, which he does by insisting how “our faith is not opposed to the doctrines of the Veds and the Shastras...Krishna occurs in the portion of the Veds” (MLC 344-348). This apologetic stance is put to test when Jadunathji is asked to comment on the vernacular literature of the tradition. Although the Mahārāj does claim that the Brajbhāṣā commentaries of Gokulnāthjī are considered authoritative in the sect (344), elsewhere he explains how he has never read any “theological or philosophical work in the Brij Bhasha on the Vallabhacharya religion” (349). He later states how the *Caurāsī* and the *Do Sau Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtās* (hagiographies of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha’s disciples) hold no authority in the sect whatsoever (354).

Earlier in the trial, the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās* are invoked in an effort to demonstrate the immoral character of Puṣṭimārg. Runchor Munjee, a Puṣṭimārg *baniyā*, is called to testify on a particular *vārtā* in which a devotee, Kṛṣṇadās, is described as assisting his

wife in carrying out an adulterous affair.⁸³ Mulji’s lawyers are interested in knowing whether the texts condemn or condone such conduct. Runchor Munjee admits that all characters in the *vārtā* are indeed praised, and after being asked to further comment on other *vārtā* narratives of questionable morality, he qualifies his statements by saying: “Not being acquainted with the Shastras, I cannot say whether or not these stories are repugnant to religion or morality in one sense” (143). In the same testimony, Runchor Munjee is later questioned about “*rās maṇḍalīs*” – the rumored orgiastic gatherings of Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇavs – and the line of questioning again returns to Kṛṣṇadās’ *vārtā*.

Throughout the duration of the libel case, as well as in reformist critiques of Puṣṭimārg in the years prior to and after the trial, attempts such as these were constantly being made. Mulji and others collapsed or drew connections between any implicit or explicit references to “adulterine” or erotic love in the Vaiṣṇav Purāṇas (such as the Bhāgavata, Viṣṇu, and Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas) and especially in the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās* and vernacular songs being sung in *gopī bhāv*, with *actual* acts of sexual impropriety, such as the organization of so-called *rās maṇḍalīs* and the alleged sexual relations between

⁸³ The *vārtā* they are referring to appears to be *vārtā* 75 from the *Caurasī Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā*, which is about the Brahmin Kṛṣṇadās and his wife. The narrative may be summarized as follows: When, one day, several Vaiṣṇavs visited Kṛṣṇadās’ home while he was away, his wife realized there was no food in the house to offer them. She went to the home of a wealthy trader in the town who had once promised to give her anything she wanted if she spent the night with him. She asked him for grains and groceries and told him she would come to his home later that night in exchange for the items. She cooked the food, offered it to Śrīnāthjī, and fed the *prasād* (consecrated food-offerings) to the Vaiṣṇavs. When Kṛṣṇadās came home and realized what his wife had done, he prostrated before her and praised her for preserving their *dharma* and moral obligations of feeding fellow Vaiṣṇavs. He told her they needed to fulfill her promise to the wealthy trader and even carried his wife to the trader’s home so as to make sure her feet to do not become wet and dirty since it was raining outside. In the end, of course, the wealthy trader realized how spiritually dedicated the couple are, and prostrated before them. The wife’s chastity remained preserved, and the couple are praised in the *vārtā* (Dalmia 2001b).

Gosvāmīs and their female disciples.⁸⁴ Puṣṭimārg was portrayed as a sect that both institutionally and doctrinally sanctions adultery. Thus, the sect and its leaders could be delegitimized on grounds of immorality by the British court and not necessarily on theological claims of “heresy” or “heterodoxy” as Mulji alleged in his article.

In response, Jadunathji repeatedly attempts to draw clear ties between Puṣṭimārg and Sanskrit culture and learning. He testifies how he opened a Sanskrit school in Surat, in addition to a Gujarati school, so children may learn the Sanskrit language (MLC 341). He also insists on locating Puṣṭimārg textually authority only in its Sanskritic sources and not in the vernacular literature, such as the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās*.⁸⁵ This claim to Sanskritic authority by Jadunathji, by later Gosvāmīs, and even by lay followers indexes the ways in which “Hinduism” in general was being constructed by European Orientalists and by Hindu reformers and revivalists along more upper-caste, patriarchal, and Sanskritized lines. In order to contextualize Jadunathji’s own persistence and anxieties over legitimizing Puṣṭimārg vis-à-vis Sanskritic/Vedic authority, it is helpful to take a look at some of the religious reform movements of nineteenth century Gujarat.

⁸⁴ In his *History of the Sect of Maharajas in Western India* (1865), Mulji describes these “Rās Maṇḍalīs” as “carnal love meetings,” which are held at the homes of wealthy Vaiṣṇavs. At these meetings, Mulji claims, “licentious narratives” are read from the *Caurāsī* and *Da Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇav kī Vārtās*: “The reading of these books excites and stimulates the passions, and we may be prepared to expect what must follow” (129).

⁸⁵ In this testimony on March 1st, 1862 Jadunathji Mahārāj explains how “All the sacred books of my sect are in Sanskrit; they are regarded as authorities even in Brij Bhasa, if they correspond with the Sanskrit originals” (mlc 360). Amrita Shodhan demonstrates how, after the trial, Jadunathji denounces *all* the vernacular literature of Puṣṭimārg in his journal, *Swadharma Vardhak ane Sanshaya Chhedak*, after determining that the vernacular commentaries do not match the Sanskrit works (1995, 240fn95).

Religious Reform and the Quest for Authority

R.L. Raval, in his work *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Gujarat during the Nineteenth Century* (1987), argues that the process of Brahmanization/Sanskritization in the religious traditions of Gujarat had already begun in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the efforts of Sahajananda Svāmī and his Svāmīnārāyaṇ *sampradāy*. Sahajananda (1781-1830), a *sarvaria* Brahmin born in the outskirts of Ayodhya, became an ascetic early in his life and arrived in Gujarat in 1800. He eventually gathered a large following among the Rājput, *kathi*, *kuṇbī/pāṭidār* and artisan castes of Gujarat and was revered as an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇ by his followers. Although he never explicitly made references to Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, Sahājānanda earnestly critiqued the debauchery of priests and *sādhus* of his time, and demanded a “thorough moral cleansing of the society of Gujarat” (Hardiman 1988, 1907; Williams 27-28). He advocated for “blood-less” fire sacrifices, and even performed several large-scale *yagñas* during his lifetime (Raval 15-16). Unlike the hereditary leaders of the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy* he is said to have practiced strict celibacy, which included refusing to make any physical or even ocular contact with females. This practice was endorsed by later leaders and ascetics (*sādhus*) in the sect and it materialized institutionally with the gendered separation of space in Svāmīnārāyaṇ temples, the creation of separate temples just for females, and the exclusive initiation and teaching of female disciples by female ascetics (*sādhvīs*) of the tradition.⁸⁶ Sahajananda demanded that his disciples adhere to a strict vegetarian diet, relinquish the consumption of alcohol and drugs like opium, cease

⁸⁶ Among the two-hundred and twelve precepts or regulations Sahajananda included in his *Śikṣāpatrī* (1826) twenty-six vows correspond to the relationship between women and *sādhus*: “Even seeing a woman or her portrait or pronouncing her name was prohibited” (Raval 12).

“superstitious” practices such as exorcisms, and stop believing in evil spirits or ghosts, and village gods and goddesses. Instead he encouraged the worship of Nārāyaṇ-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and the “high-gods” of *smārta* Brahmins: Śiva, Gaṇeṣa, Pārvatī, and Sūrya. He also vehemently attacked the practice of women singing “bawdy and lewd” songs during Holī festivals and weddings. In fact, Sahajananda is said to have requested a few of the sects’ *sādhus*, such as Svāmī Muktananda and Premananda, to compose more appropriate songs for these occasions (Williams 24-27; Hardiman 1988, 1907; Raval 18-19; Parekh 174). Needless to say, many of these injunctions correlate with both contemporaneous and later reformist appeals for change in the religious cultures of Gujarat. It is therefore not surprising that, unlike the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy*, the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect met with general approval by British officials of the time (Williams 21, 29).⁸⁷

Later Gujarati religious reform societies, like Durgaram Mehtaji’s Manav Dharma Sabha (founded in Surat in 1844), would go on to criticize both Puṣṭimārg and Svāmīnārāyaṇ because of the claim made by Puṣṭimārgī Gosvāmīs and Sahajananda to be living incarnations of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu. The *sabhā* also denounced superstitious or “magical” practices, as well as image worship (“idolatry”) and the performance of pilgrimage. Instead, the society promoted Sanskrit learning, Upaniṣadic philosophy, and a belief in one God (Raval 68-72). Due to Durgaram Mehtaji’s own commitment to Sanskrit literature as well as his monotheistic readings of religion, he and Karsondas Mulji’s friend and supporter, Narmadshankar Lalshankar, eventually invited Dayananda Sarasvati on a lecture tour in Surat in 1874 (102). By this time, Dayananda Sarasvati had

⁸⁷ In the religious literature of the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect, the relationship between Sahajananda and Sir John Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay at the time, is very much celebrated, to the degree that it is alleged Governor Malcolm even converted into the sect (Williams 5; Hardiman 1988, 1908).

already arrived in Bombay due to the persistent efforts of Mulji's close followers, such as Dharmsi (the brother of Lakhmidas Khimji, who was an important witness in the libel case) and Jaikishendas Jivanram.⁸⁸ Upon arriving in Bombay, Dayananda was also close to completing the first edition of his famous *Satyarth Prakas* and he began to launch an aggressive and successful reform campaign against sectarian traditions like Puṣṭimārg and Svāminārāyaṇ. For Sarasvati, the sects' ritual practices, theologies, and emphasis on Purānic literature were the antithesis of Vedic culture, which for him constituted "authentic" Hinduism. However, his unilateral advocacy of the Vedas and ritual fire sacrifice, and his admonishment of any form of image worship, prevented his Arya Samaj from gaining a strong hold in parts of Gujarat. For example, in Ahmedbad only about thirty people joined the Samaj in 1875 – including Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Mahipatram Rupram – who were already members of the more popular Ahmedabad-based Prathana Samaj (Raval 140-141).

Mahipatram Rupram (1829-1891), an important educationalist and Elphinstone graduate, was associated with institutions like the Gujarat Vernacular Society, the Vidhava Vivahottejak Mandali (widow remarriage association), Bal Lagna Nisedhak Mandali (anti-child marriage association), and the Hindu Sansar Sudhar Samaj

⁸⁸ In Varanasi on November 1869, Dharmsi and Jaikishendas witnessed Dayananda's public disputation with orthodox *pundits* on the issue of whether image-worship was sanctioned by the Vedas (Jordens 140). Dharmsi and Jaikishendas were impressed with Dayananda's polemical skills and Sanskrit learning and urged him to come to Bombay, the head-quarters of Mulji's crusade against Puṣṭimārg. Although, by this time, Mulji had passed away (in 1871) he did publish a short book called "Ved Dharma and Sacred Books after Vedas," in which he discredits Purānic literature in favour of the Vedas. In this text Mulji also refers to Hinduism as "Arya Dharma" (Motiwala 73, 318). Furthermore, as we know, Mulji named his newspaper *Satya Prakas*. Mulji's reform activities and writings must have influenced Dayananda Sarasvati's own campaigns and ideologies. In addition to sharing their general aversion towards Purānic literature, image worship, and the Puṣṭimārg sect, Dayananda titled his most important work *Satyartha Prakas* and named his society "Arya Samaj." The Arya Samaj was established in Bombay in 1875, within a year after Dayananda's arrival in western India, and Mulji's supporters and friends became the founding members of the society (Jordens 141-142).

(Hindu reform society). As an educationalist, he was a member of the Hope Text-Book Committee and translated many English texts into Gujarati. He wrote several books himself, including one on his travels to England (*England nī Musāfarī*), a satirical novel on the relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws (*Sāsu Vahunī Laḍāī*), as well as biographies on Durgaram Mehtaji and Karsondas Mulji. In 1871, he eventually helped Bholanath Sarabhai establish the Ahmedabad Prathana Samaj, and when Sarabhai passed away in 1886, Mahipatram Rupram became the society's president (133-134). The Ahmedabad Prathana Samaj, which was modeled after the Bombay-based Prathana Samaj founded Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, shared a similar ideological platform as Durgaram Mehtaji's Manav Dharm Sabha.⁸⁹ That is, like Mehtaji, Bholanath Sarabhai advocated for the worship of one "omnipresent God," a God who should be worshipped "not by external ceremonies, but only by heart" (136). Sarabhai was critical of "idol worship," did not believe in the performance of rituals like *śrāddha* (ancestor rituals), acts of pilgrimage, and, not surprisingly, detested the leaders of the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy* (136).

It is clear that the religious reform movements of nineteenth century Gujarat share a general aversion towards Puṣṭimārg. The Svāmīnārāyaṇ *sampradāy*, by contrast, escaped some of their criticism. For example, Narmadashankar Lalshankar, who was one of Karsondas Mulji's greatest supporters and reform-minded Gujaratis of his time, did have some reservations about the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect but nevertheless felt that

⁸⁹ The Prathana Samaj was established in Bombay by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang in 1867. However, as Christine Dobbin illustrates, the Society also owed its formation to the encouragement offered by the Brahma Samājis of Bengal, including K.C. Sen, the President of the Bengal Brahma Samaj, who visited Bombay in 1864 and 1867. It was apparently under the influence of Sen, as well as the English social reformer, Mary Carpenter, who was visiting Bombay at the time that the Prathana Samaj was finally established (Dobbin 1972, 249-250).

Sahajananda introduced “many changes for the betterment of the social life in Gujarat” (Raval 101). Narmadashankar was also critical of Dayananda Sarasvati’s promotion of Vedic literature and ritual. It would seem that for someone like Narmadashankar – and for many other Gujaratis who perhaps became disenchanted with Puṣṭimārg due to the controversies surrounding the sect – the Svāmīnārayaṇ *sampradāy* provided a “middle-ground,” a reconciliation between the extreme views held by Dayananda against image worship, *bhakti* practices, and Purāṇic literature, on the one hand, and the impropriety apparently condoned and embodied by Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, on the other hand. Svāmīnārayan provided a familiar Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇaite ritual culture, which was modeled on Puṣṭimārg after all, but also institutionalized gender exclusion and patriarchal values by separating female disciples from both the sect’s male leaders and male followers.

Finally, although the late-nineteenth century activities of the Vaiṣṇav traditionalist, Harischandra (1850-1885), were centered in Banaras and not Gujarat *per se*, his concerns, in many ways, were common to the reform and revival movements of the period. Like his contemporaries, Harischandra’s prolific engagement with print culture and his involvement with the Dharma Sabha and Tadiya Samaj were motivated by a concern of what it means to be “a Hindu” in a modernizing world. More importantly, however, a focus on Harischandra is valuable because, like Mulji, Harischandra was interested in addressing these issues as a Puṣṭimārgī.⁹⁰ Vasudha Dalmia (1997), in her comprehensive and detailed study on the life and literary activities of Harischandra, notes how Harischandra (like Mulji) was critical of the opulent lifestyles and sexual exploits of

⁹⁰ Like Mulji, who was an editor for the *Stribodh*, Harischandra was also an editor for the first women’s journal in Hindi, the *Balabodhini* (Dalmia 1997, 129).

Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs. Harischandra also insisted that Gosvāmīs could not demand or exercise religious authority by virtue of their status and positions as members of the Vallabha-*kul*; they had to “prove their credentials” (365). However, similarities with Mulji end here. That is to say, although Harischandra called for a “cleansing” of Hindu religion, he extended it to Vedic religion as well, such as the practice of Vedic animal sacrifices (359). On the one hand, his ideologies were couched in the language of Sanskritic traditions (such as his invocation of *hindu dharma* or *veda purāṇa vihīt ārya dharma*) and, like Durgaram Mehtaji and Bholanath Sarabhai, he presented a strictly monotheistic view of Hindu traditions. On the other hand, *unlike* his contemporaries, Harischandra never distanced himself from his Puṣṭimārg or theistic affiliations; instead, he constructed his vision of a pan-Indian Hindu (*sanātana*) *dharma* through the prism of a Puṣṭimārg-Vaiṣṇav ethos. Harischandra defended image worship and saw *bhakti* as constitutive of “modern Hinduism” (340-390).

Sanskritization and Middle-Class Moralities

The nineteenth century reform movements of Gujarat index the ways in which the rising middle-classes promoted new ideas of status, respectability, and comportment, which, as we have discussed above, were mapped onto the bodies of family women. The middle-classes also wanted to position themselves as morally superior to both the upper-classes and lower-classes. Reformers like Karsondas Mulji criticize the upper class *śeṭh* community for their political and social apathy as well as their opulent spending habits on caste dinners and on rites-of-passage like weddings, pregnancies, and death rituals (Motiwala 352). Even in debates on early marriage and consummation, “high and

luxurious living” is blamed for early puberty (Gidumal 1889, xxvi). Both the upper and lower classes are berated for their lack of (western/English) education, and reformers see this as the cause of *śeṭhs*’ irrational acceptance of the divinity of Gosvāmīs and in their belief in the ritual efficacy of religious ceremonies and acts of pilgrimage. Members of the lower classes and castes are criticized for their superstitious beliefs in “magic,” exorcism, animal sacrifices, the evil-eye, possession, and their worship of village gods and goddesses.⁹¹

Reformist societies like the Prathana Samaj, Manav Dharma Sabha, or the Arya Samaj sought to establish their moral superiority over sects like Puṣṭimārg and Svāmīnārāyaṇ on rational grounds: the sects are critiqued for their ritual orthodoxy, “polytheistic” beliefs, and their followers’ deification of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs and Sahajananda Svāmī. However, reform-minded Gujaratis like Narmadashankar, who were sympathetic towards a sect like Svāmīnārāyaṇ, project the moral superiority of the sect over one like Puṣṭimārg based on the patriarchal and Brahmanical values prescribed by Sahajanand. Finally, as noted above, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, such as Brajratānji Mahārāj, the father of Jadunathji, engaged in discussions with the likes of Durgaram Mehtaji about the need to eradicate superstitious or magic practices in Gujarat. Here, a Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmī is seeking to establish the moral superiority of Puṣṭimārg by distancing the sect from what are considered “popular,” rural, and lower-caste religious practices of the “uneducated.” Similarly, Hariachandra critiqued Tantric-based ritual practices – along with

⁹¹ For example, in 1849 the well-known Gujarati poet, reformer, and Svāmīnārāyaṇ follower, Dalpatram Dhayabhai, submitted a prize-winning essay to the Gujarat Vernacular Society on the various “superstitious” practices of Gujarat, such as possession, the belief in ghosts, and the evil-eye. The book is titled *Bhut Nibandh*, and his friend and colleague, Alexander Forbes, later translated it into English, with the title “Demonology and Popular Superstitions of Gujarat” (1849).

Vedic religion (such as animal sacrifices) – saw (Vaiṣṇav) *bhakti* as a unifying force under which all the “sectarianisms” existing in India could be subsumed. Thus, by invoking practices and values such as western education, Sanskritic traditions, or “superstitious” and Tantric practices, intellectual elites from various backgrounds – members of the English educated middle-classes, Sanskritists such as Dayananda, as well as religious leaders like Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmī and Harischandra – were all engaged in various degrees of moral positioning with one another.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of founders and participants of these social and religious reform societies in the Bombay Presidency drew from the Brahmin castes, with the exception of a few *baniyās* and *bhāṭiyās* like Karsondas Mulji, Mangaldas Nathubhai, and Lakhmidas Khimji. Ironically, although the practice of excommunication from caste was critiqued by reformers, individuals like Durgaram Mehtaji, Mulji, and Bholanath Sarabhai all respected caste rules of purity and pollution. For example, when the *Rast Goftar tatha Satya Prakas* urged the formation of reformist “clubs” or societies, it was made clear that meals would not be provided on site to mitigate anxieties around inter-caste dining (Shodhan 2001, 124).

What we can conclude from this discussion is that throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, middle-class moralities and status is being articulated by either one or all of the following markers: urbanization, an English education, an adherence to upper-caste values of purity and pollution or Sanskritization, the critique of “superstitious” practices, and the promotion of the patriarchal nuclear family. Women become implicated in this process of status production by the degree to which they embodied or breached any of these “moral” criteria.

Reform and Revival: Puṣṭimārg Post-Libel

The swift circulation, in both English and Gujarati newspapers, of the court's proceedings from the libel case certainly helped to reify reformist efforts to malign the Puṣṭimārg sect and its leaders. It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to say that after this point – with the exception of a few scholarly writings – almost every English source alluding to the Puṣṭimārg sect (as well as Indian religious sources with a reformist angle) used the events surrounding the libel case as a hermeneutic lens through which they filtered their discussion of Puṣṭimārg.⁹² The sect embodied all that was “Other” in Orientalist discourses of India: the over-sexed Indian male, orgiastic religious rituals, women as victims of Brahmin male corruption and vulgarity, and an effete God. Ultimately, the sect epitomized the moral degradation and irrationality of modern Hinduism. Within the mercantile community, the reform activities surrounding the libel case are said to have elicited a series of schisms within the *bhāṭiyā* caste, which may have led to the caste group's eventual disintegration (Shodhan 2001, 180; Simpson 2008, 101). According to Karsondas Mulji's biographer, B.N. Motiwala, most members of the Puṣṭimārg community sympathised with Jadunathji Mahārāj throughout the case. He explains how “Even in the Kapole caste to which Karsondas belonged, ninety nine per cent of that caste was dead against Karsondas” (137). Mulji himself admitted that not more than fifty *śeṭhs* in all of Bombay were responsive to reform efforts, and only two

⁹² There are, of course several exceptions to such representations of Puṣṭimārg. Two notable works include F.S. Growse's *Mathurā, A District Memoir* (1882) and George Grierson's *Modern Hinduism and its Debt to the Nestorians* (1907), both of which Vasudha Dalmia underscores in her work on Hariścandra (1850-1885) and his efforts to systemize and consolidate Vaiṣṇav identities in the nineteenth century. Growse attempts to argue for doctrinal and ritual similarities between Christianity and Puṣṭimārg, whereas Grierson viewed *bhakti* religion (including Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* as propounded by Vallabha) as characterizing “mainstream” Hindu religion in India. Although he does make note of the Libel Case, he explains how such degeneracy is no longer present in his age (Dalmia 1995, 196-199).

prominent *śeṭhs* from the *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities (Mangaldas Nathubhai and Lakhmidas Khimji, respectively) explicitly supported Mulji in his campaign. According to the *Rast Goftar*, only four or five large families in the city had attempted to stop the women of their homes from visiting *havelīs* in the months leading up to the libel case, and even such efforts did not prove successful (Shodhan 1995, 224). In the months following the closure of the case, the paper continued propagating messages of guilt by stating that men who sent their wives to the *havelīs* of Gosvāmīs, and risked their family's honor and reputation should be ashamed of themselves.

The libel case was perhaps indicative of the larger concern the *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities had in monitoring the public movement and activities of women from their families. For example, during his testimony in the case, the *bhāṭiyā śeṭh* Bhimjee Purushottam, described how during a caste meeting in 1855 a resolution was reached, which stipulated among other things that

Bhattia women should not go about in their Garries without 'purdas' or screens. It was also resolved that the women should not sit in the roads on the occasion of any death in the caste; also that they should attend early at the general caste dinner, etc. It was also proposed to prevent women from going astray on the pretense of visiting the Maharaja's temples; but that proposition was not acted upon. (MLC 333)

During his cross-examination by Mr. Anstey, Varjivandas Madhavdas voices a similar concern made by the *bhāṭiyās*: "There was talk, I believe, among the Bhattias that their females should go at proper hours to the temples of the Maharajas. The women were to go only in the morning and evening. This was about ten months ago" (MLC 140). As Amrita Shodhan indicates, discussions such as these centered on questioning "the morality of the temple and its effect on women, family and the home" (1995, 224). At the

same time that the home was being reconstituted as the primary site of cultural production, reformist debates promoted a repertoire of actions that characterized “proper” public conduct for women, such as *pardā*, observing proper mourning behavior, cease singing “obscene” songs, and demarcating when, how, and if women can go to the *havelī*. This “new patriarchy” ushered in by the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century were not necessarily advocating for the total removal of women from public spaces, rather they were concerned with regulating and monitoring their movements. For example, as we discussed above, what disconcerted Mulji and perhaps many families about the presence of women in *havelīs* was not only the potential threat of “liscentious” activitiy between guru and lay woman, but also the close interaction of female and male lay practitioners that occured in the *havelī* during *darśan* periods, in public festivals like Holī, et cetera. This is why several recommendations were made as to the appropriate times women should go for *darśan* at the *havelī* (such as from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., and to not visit in the afternoons) and what they can do there (they should enter the *zenānā* only to meet the Mahārāj’s wife and daughter, and they should not be allowed to visit the Mahārāj to offer him fruit in private). The complete exclusion of women’s participation in temple-based activities was not necessarily advocated. Though, when this almost did occur in 1858, when Jivanlalji Mahārāj in an effort to resist appearing in court closed the doors to the *havelī*, women from the community vehemently challenged this attempt to totally prevent them from visiting the temple. Ultimately, Jivanlalji re-opened the *havelī* doors when many women convinced their husbands to sign a document, which stipulated that no member of the community could solicit the Mahārāj to appear in court.

For the most part, reformers, like Mulji, were not even recommending a complete break from the sect but were encouraging shifts in the ways female lay practitioners approached the tradition and its leaders. Indeed Mulji himself did not totally abandon his connections to Puṣṭimārg. He, along with other reformers, wanted lay practitioners to regard Gosvāmīs as spiritual leaders and not as living-incarnations of Kṛṣṇa. The successful expansion of the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect in Gujarat demonstrates that regulating the movement of women in temple contexts worked: it was not that women could no longer visit a temple but their visit had to be marked by certain actions, such as adhering to the gendered separation of space in the temple and by the gendered relationship between the female *sādhvī* and lay woman. Finally, although I have not come across examples where Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs requested that the content of *garbās* and *dhols* be changed, Sahajananda of the Svāmīnārāyaṇ tradition did explicitly attempt to do this. Again, women were not necessarily encouraged to abandon the singing of devotional or wedding songs in public altogether. Instead the songs had to be cleansed and sanitized by removing any “vulgar” or erotic connotations so as to make them more palatable to emerging middle-class moralities and tastes.

As for institutional changes, drawing on D.D. Sampat’s writings in the *bhāṭiyā* caste journal (*Bhāṭiyā Yuvak*), Edward Simpson explains how reformers within the *bhāṭiyā* community called for both an organizational and doctrinal shift in the Puṣṭimārg community during this period. Doctrinally, they urged that the “original” writings of Vallabha and texts like the *Gītā* should be taught at *havelīs* in place of Brajbhāṣā Puṣṭimārg texts. It was proposed that a committee should be established to overview religious literature in *havelīs*, and classes should be offered to practitioners on the

improved texts. Institutionally, reformers wanted women to cease going to the *havelīs* for early morning and late night *darśans* and that eventually female Gosvāmīs be introduced so as to better supervise the movement of female Puṣṭimārgīs in the *havelīs*. Finally, reformers called upon Gosvāmīs to relinquish their sole monopoly of Puṣṭimārg temples by denouncing their status as divinities or incarnations of Kṛṣṇa and to finally open the *havelīs* to public “ownership”: “Private ownership of the *havelīs* and their profits was to be abolished in favor of a general management by the Vaishnava society” (Sampat 1938 qtd in Simpson, 100).

Both Amirta Shodhan (2001) and Shandip Saha (2004) corroborate Sampat’s description of the potential ramifications of these late nineteenth century reform efforts on the Puṣṭimārg sect. Shodhan notes how leading theologians from the sect, particularly Pandit Gattulalji and Devakinandacarya, actively sought to re-fashion elements of Puṣṭimārg throughout the 1870s in Bombay city. For example, they engaged in a series of public lectures on “the principles of Vaishnava dharma” and guru-śiṣya (guru-devotee) relationships, published handbills, and drew on the sect’s Sanskrit literary sources, such as the *Subodhinī*, Vallabhācārya’s commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Shodhan 180). Devakinandacarya is said to have preached weekly on themes related to “Vaiṣṇav *dharma* and sanātan *dharma*,” and demanded that lay practitioners not touch the feet of Gosvāmīs. Furthermore, in response to critiques launched by Madhavtirtha Sankaracarya of Dwarka/Dakore Devakinandacarya published a work titled *Puṣṭimārg Vedic he* (Vaidya 251). Saha explains how the then *tilkāyat* (chief Gosvāmī) of Nathdwara, Govardhanlal, also proposed a return to Puṣṭimārg Sanskrit treatises and provided

accessible commentaries for practitioners to read. In addition, the *tilkāyat* advocated for the opening of schools to teach the “younger generation” about Puṣṭimārg (310).

Briefly, if we take a look at contemporary Puṣṭimārg, many of these changes appear to have materialized in some form or another. This is not to suggest that there is a direct causal relationship between the two, however, it is important to take note of these late nineteenth century transformations and their on-going effects. For example, the recommendation that schools be opened for the purpose of teaching individuals about Puṣṭimārg appears to have found its culmination when the Dwarkadīs *havelī* in Kankroli established a centre known as “Vidya Vibhag.” This institution appears to have formed over several decades during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the *havelī*’s contemporary website (www.vallabhkankroli.org), the Vidya Vibhag was most active during the 1930s-1940s but seems to be less operational today. The site describes the Vidya Vibhag as “not only [now] the centre of collection of literature and the centre of Academic activities but also the centre of Arts like painting, poetry etc.” In addition to funding an extensive library, other institutions established under the auspices of the Vidya Vibhag include the Dwarkesh Sanskrit Paatshala, with branches in Mathura and Halol, the Balkrishna Pushtimargiya Pustakalaya, the Swayam Sevak Mandal Vibhag, a Dwarkesh Kavi Mandal, Dwarkesh Chitrashala, and the Dwarkesh Suddhadvaita Brahmcharyashram. In the brief biographical sketches of lay Puṣṭimārgīs included in the Gujarati historical work, *Puṣṭimārgna 500 Varṣ Gauravpurṇ Itihās* (Shah 1952), a Puṣṭimārg woman by the name of Yashodaben Ramanlal Shastri (b. 1913) is described as having passed examinations offered by such institutions as the

Pustimargiya Vaisnav Mahasabha, the Balkrsna Suddhadvaita Mahasabha, as well as the Kankroli Vidhya Vibhag itself (155).

Although it is not certain when such “classes” or “examinations” in Puṣṭimārg theology for lay practitioners began to occur, today many Puṣṭimārgīs, including both adults and children, participate in such pedagogical activities either by attending Puṣṭimārg *śivīrs* (“retreats”), classes at their local *havelīs*, or by taking long-distance classes and examinations. More recently, Gosvāmī Vrajeshkumar of the Kankroli *havelī* established the “Shri Vakpati Foundation” in 1995-96, with its headquarters located at the Śrī Beṭhak mandir in Baroda. According to the same Kankroli *havelī* website the Vakpati Foundation is described as a charitable trust, established “with a view to undertake multifarious activities for the social, religious, spiritual and overall upliftment of mankind, leading to highest sublimation of their life, by propagating Indian Vedic Philosophy especially propounded by Jagad Guru Shri Vallabhacharyaji.” Vrajeshkumar Gosvāmī’s eldest son, Vagishkumarji Gosvāmī, is the Foundation’s president and managing trustee today. Since 1996, the Foundation has established a Puṣṭimārgiya Open University (the SriVallabha Vidya Pith), which offers long-distance courses in Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy, and even grants a PhD if a student completes all ten years of the degree. Another open university, the Vitthalesh Vidyapith, was established in 2006 and offers seven years’ worth of courses. Other projects of the Foundation include compiling a Puṣṭimārg Encyclopedia, with a focus on Śuddhādvaita philosophy, charitable work for “the sick and hungry,” publishing a bi-monthly magazine (*Charnamrt Raspan*), releasing audio-video media and literary publications, as well as organising a “shri Vallabh Young parivar for inculcating Pustimargiya Sanskar in [the] younger generaton.”

The libel case also successfully demonstrated the undoing of the exclusive social and religious authority wielded by Puṣṭimārgī Gosvāmīs as well as by caste leaders of *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā mahājans*. Through their engagement with the colonial judicial system, Gosvāmīs, *śeṭhs*, and ordinary *baniyā-bhāṭiya* caste members were treated as citizens, all equal and subject to the same universal law. In some instances, even the religious authority of Gosvāmīs over Puṣṭimārg temples was starting to be undermined when several Vaiṣṇavs began building *havelīs* through the 1870s and 80s. Although these new temples followed the daily liturgy of Puṣṭimārg *havelīs*, they no longer required a Gosvāmī presiding as the sole custodian. Instead such *havelīs* were to be named after the patrons who financed their construction and were controlled by a board of trustees. Shodhan describes how, in Bombay, during the 1870s and 1880s some *śeṭhs* like Gokuldas Tejpal (a *bhāṭiyā* leader and reformer), Mulji Jetha (a *bhāṭiyā* leader) and Varjivandas Madhavdas, the *kāpol baniyā* leader and supporter of Gosvāmīs during the libel case, were involved in building new temples (2001, 181). There are also many examples of “trust *havelīs*” being established later during the twentieth century, such as the Murlidhar temple built by the Thackerseys in Santa Cruz in 1960, the Vallabhasadan temple in Ahmedabad (f.1954), the Govardhannathjī *mandīr* (f.1995), and numerous others since.⁹³

Finally, print culture was another arena through which lay Puṣṭimārgīs began to, in some ways, circumvent the religious authority of the Gosvāmī in the late nineteenth

⁹³ It is important to note that with the Charitable and Religious Trust Act of 1920 and the Bombay Public Trust Act of 1950, all religious and charitable public trusts came under the administration of the Indian government. This included Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* operated by Gosvāmīs as well. Meanwhile in “trust *havelīs*,” built and administered by Puṣṭimārg lay persons and where no Gosvāmī presides, all ritual activities are performed by Brahmin ritual specialists known as *mukhiyās*. There are numerous such trust *havelīs* being constructed across Gujarat every year.

and early twentieth centuries. As discussed in chapter two, lay Puṣṭimārgīs engaged in the publication of Puṣṭimārg performance literature, *vārtā* materials, and translations and commentaries on Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy. An individual like Lallubhai Pranvallabhdas Parekh (1850-1911), who published a series of books in Gujarati and English on Puṣṭimārg themes, serves as a good example of an individual who was molded by the social and religious reform movements of the late nineteenth century. Parekh came from a Puṣṭimārg family in Nadiad and moved to Ahmedabad to acquire an English education. After working as a teacher in the high schools of Ahmedabad, Rajkot, and Kheda, he furthered his education and eventually become a judge. Perhaps through his friendship with Manilal Nathubhai Dwivedi (1858-1898), the Gujarati educationalist, Vendantist, and Elphinstone graduate, Parekh joined the Prathana Samaj – only to later abandon it. He also became a member of the Theosophical Society, which, with the help of Nathubhai Dwivedi had begun to establish several branches in Gujarat and Kathiawad. Parekh would eventually go on to become the Chair Person of the Theosophical Society’s Nadiad branch for the remainder of his life. However, in the meantime, and as a staunch Puṣṭimārgī, Parekh was also closely acquainted with Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, like Gosvāmī Jaydevlalji Maharaj, whom he met in 1890-91, and Gosvāmī Narsinhlalji Mahārāj. During this time, he published books on Vallabhācārya’s life and on themes related to Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophies, such as *Śrī Vallabha carita*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Līlāmṛit*, *Śrī Mālāprasāṅgār*, *Śrīmad Vallabhacāryājī Nu Vṛtānt*, *Śrīmad Vallabhacāryājikṛt Tattvadīp*, et cetera.

In April 1909, Parekh appears to have presented a work in English at the Convention of Religion in Calcutta. In the essay, entitled *Śrīmad Vallabhācārya: His*

Life, Philosophy, and Teachings, Parekh depicts Puṣṭimārg theology as wholly in line with Vedic knowledge and the Gītā. He of course makes no mention of the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās* or of the practice of *sevā*. When he does discuss *sevā*, he argues that “mental *sevā*” (*mānasi sevā*) is the most superior. Parekh’s reading of Pustimarg in this light is not unfounded since he is clearly drawing from Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and later Puṣṭimārg theologians’ discourses on Puṣṭimārg philosophy. What is noteworthy, however, is that he is not a Puṣṭimārgī Goswāmī or traditional scholar, but a lay practitioner, who was very active in his role as a defender of Puṣṭimārg identity in the face of reformist critiques. He acknowledges how “the nineteenth century did unfavorable injustice to Śrīmad Vallabhācārya.” His active role in perpetuating a Vaiṣṇav identity through print culture and through institutions like “societies” is illustrated by his efforts in establishing a Puṣṭimārgī library in Nadiad, and by being among the key founders of both the Gujarat Vaisya Sabha in 1903, and the Vaisnav Parisad in 1906 (Kesav Seth, 47-65).

Shodhan also notes how towards the end of the nineteenth century, the printing and publishing of Vaiṣṇav texts increased rapidly. Puṣṭimārg journals like the Vaisnav Dharmpatāk solicited help from lay Puṣṭimārgīs Vaiṣṇavs for the acquisition and publication of texts, and to raise funds for building libraries that would house Puṣṭimārg literature (2001, 181). The engagement of figures like Lallubhai Parekh with print culture should be understood as part of a larger process of “democratizing” Sanskrit learning, which was perhaps most notably initiated by reformers like Rammohun Roy and his Brahmo Samāj in Bengal. Though not all of the texts that lay Puṣṭimārgīs helped circulate through publication were Sanskrit treatises, their engagement with print culture

nevertheless demonstrates another mode by which the authority of Gosvāmīs was being challenged and reconstituted.

By way of concluding, I turn to the question of women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg during this period of reform. Thus far, it is clear that Puṣṭimārg women were involved in the sect’s *living* religious culture as patrons, practioners, pilgrims, and as performers of devotional singing. The high degree of anxiety around Puṣṭimārg women’s activities during the libel case is itself an indication of women’s active positions in the sect. However, this is also illustrative of the gendered mode by which reformers have always used women as discursive sites to debate tradition, morality, patriarchal values, and caste/class politics. Furthermore, as discussed above, women were also not the silent objects of reform; they protested their disapproval at Jivanlalji Mahārāj’s attempts to close the *havelī* doors for *darśan* by lobbying volleys at the reformers, and pressuring their husbands to rectify the situation by signing the documents Jivanlalji requested.

Women’s roles as patrons can also be deduced from Jadunathji Mahārāj’s testimony in the libel case when he denies having told Lakhmidas Khimjee that improving the behavior of other Mahārājs with their female devotees cannot be accomplished, or must be done gradually, because “our income is chiefly derived from females” (testimony from February 27th 1862, MLC 346). Jadunathji Maharaj also states several times how many women visit the *havelī* daily and enter the *zenānā* to visit his wife and children (testimony from Tuesday February 25th and Thursday the 27th, MLC 343, 347). Historical examples of female patrons include James Tod’s description of the large donation made by a widow at Nathdwara, which was discussed in the first chapter (see page 45). Furthermore, a court case in the Supreme Court of India from 1969

between Mahalakshmi *bahūjī* (wife of the Gosvāmī) and Ranchhoddas Kalidas over whether a *havelī* is considered a public space or a private property reveals the historical donative activities of several female patrons. The case notes that in 1861 Jasu *bāī* gifted “two fields and a house” to the Mahārāj of the Gokulnāthjī *havelī* in Nadiad. In 1881, one Harkore *bāī* made certain bequests in her will for providing the food-offerings (*sāmagrī*) for the Gokulnāthjī *svārūp*, and finally, in 1888 and 1897, two bequests were executed from the will of a Vasant *bāī* for the Gokulnāthjī *havelī* as well as for the *bahūjī*.

In the *Puṣṭimārgna 500 Varṣ Gauravpurṇ Itihās* (1952), Shah provides several short biographies of female Puṣṭimargīs who lived towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Gujarat and Bombay. The chapter is entitled “Vaiṣṇav Sannārīonā Jīvancaritro.” Rukshmani Damordas (b. 1864, the wife of *śeṭh* Balabhai Damordas, see page 81), was born into a Vaiṣṇav family, and is described as a very devoted follower of the sect. After accompanying Balkrishnalalji Mahārāj of Kankroli on a pilgrimage tour to Braj (Braj *parikrama*) with her family, she began performing *sevā* to her personal *svārūp* at home. She would invite other Puṣṭimārgīs and Gosvāmīs to her home for *satsaṅg* (“religious gathering”), and attend *Bhāgavata Purāṇa kathās* on a weekly basis. She is said to have annually made pilgrimage tours to Braj and Nathdwara, where she offered charitable donations of clothes and food to individuals, as well as made donations to the local temples. Rukshmani is also said to have financially supported the publication of Puṣṭimārg texts, and urged her husband to build a *dharmasāla* (“rest-house”) and help with the renovations of *havelīs* (150-151).

Lalitagauri Popatlal Shah (1890-1947), whose husband was an accountant general and the director of civil supply in Bombay – a couple who moved in high society

– would never dine with her husband and family outside the home. Instead she would only eat after offering food to her Ṭhakurjī *svarūp*. She is described as spending her time reading Puṣṭimārg texts, singing *kīrtans*, and performing *sevā* at home. She also went on pilgrimage to places like Nathadwar and Braj, where she would make donations (152-153). Another woman, named “Golok vāsī” Mani Ba, was born into a Vaiṣṇav family in 1880. Her inlaws, who apparently followed another sectarian tradition, would pose problems for Mani Ba because of her affiliation with Puṣṭimārg. It was only after the death of her mother-in-law that her house was visited by Gosvāmīs and other “experienced” Puṣṭimārgīs. She would perform *sevā* to her Śrināthjī *svarūp* with the help of her three daughters and son daily, and her daughters are described as being very good in singing *kīrtans*. She, along with other women, organized *satsaṅgs* at their homes and Mani Ba also went on pilgrimage to places like Braj, Nathdwara, and Kankroli over a dozen times (153). Finally, Chandaben Bhaidas (b. 1844) from Bombay, who was married to Bhaidas Maganlal, is described as performing *sevā* daily for one hour. She also spent large amounts of money organizing *Bhāgavata saptāḥs* (seven day discourses on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) in her home, and would invite other Puṣṭimārgīs at her home for *satsaṅg*. In addition to making donations to Puṣṭimārg insitutions (like the “Lad-seva Samaj”), she is also described as being a great supporter of female education; she apparently donated 10,000 Rupees to a girl’s school in Surat. She donated money to the Gujarati Hindu Ladies’ organization and was even president of a ladies’ group in her caste community (152).

These examples describe the religious and social activities of women who lived through the reformist activities of the late nineteenth century. From these

descriptions, lay women can be understood as key participants in the maintenance and embodiment of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity. Examples of their religious activities include making donations to *havelīs*, going on pilgrimage, singing Puṣṭimārg devotional songs, organizing *kathās* and *satsaṅgs* in their homes, and performing domestic *sevā* daily. Taking into consideration the potential costs of undertaking annual pilgrimage, offering gifts to *havelīs* and to their Mahārājs and *bahūjīs*, as well as organizing *Bhāgavata kathās* and patronizing and participating in women's organizations, it is clear that many of these women came from wealthy, upper-class Puṣṭimārg families.

Conclusion

In the nineteenth and early-twentieth century socio-religious reform movements of Gujarat, women and their religious activities became the sites upon which family status and respectability were debated. In the final chapter of this thesis, we trace these discourses to the present, and discuss how contemporary women's domestic ritual activities become implicated in the production and display of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and family prestige. Before we can do this, it is important to gain further insight into the religious lives and activities of Puṣṭimārg women in the sect's history. Thus far, chapters one, two, and three have highlighted several elements of Puṣṭimārg women's religious activities through the prism of historical texts, reformist writings, and socio-religious movements. However, in order to appreciate the vital role Puṣṭimārg women have played – and continue to play – in maintaining and perpetuating the sect's living traditions, in the following chapter we turn to traditional sources of Puṣṭimārg social history: the Brajbhāṣā hagiographies (*vārtās*) and the popular poetic compositions

produced by Puṣṭimārg women in Gujarati and Hindi. On the one hand, as texts that straddle the boundaries between hagiography and history, the *vārtās* provide us with a sense of how the tradition itself perceived of lay women's social positions and religious roles in Puṣṭimārg. On the other hand, the devotional writings of Puṣṭimārgī women demonstrate one of the significant ways in which women have participated in the sect, namely as authors and performers of Puṣṭimārg devotional songs.

CHAPTER 4

Gender and Genres:

Towards a Social History of Women in Puṣṭimārg

Throughout the social history of the Puṣṭimārg tradition, women have been the key actors in the performance of domestic ritual. They also remain the primary organizers of Puṣṭimārg-related social activities, such as *satsaṅg* gatherings, *bhajan maṅḍalīs* (“devotional singing groups”), and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa kathās* (commentarial discourse on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). In an effort to historically contextualize my discussion of contemporary Puṣṭimārg women’s religious participation in the following chapter, the present chapter outlines a social history of women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg more broadly. I do this by turning to traditional sources of Puṣṭimārg history, (1) the hagiographies which narrate the lives of both Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanatha’s exemplary disciples, and (2) the devotional compositions written and sung by Puṣṭimārg women.

My discussion of Puṣṭimārg women is divided between female lay practitioners and those women who hail from the Gosvāmī household, namely the wives (*bahūjīs*) and daughters (*beṭijīs*) of Mahārājs. In addition to the brief historical references provided in the previous chapters, the sect’s hagiographical literature known as *vārtās* (“accounts”) are a rich source for understanding Puṣṭimārg women’s religious practices. Through portraying the exemplary devotion of female lay practitioners, the *vārtās* provide us with an indication of the kinds of religious activities Puṣṭimārg women typically engage in. These include the performance daily *sevā* in the home, the offering of donations to

havelīs, the organization of feasts or *satsaṅgs* for fellow Vaiṣṇavs and, finally, the *vārtās* also provide examples of female poet-composers.

As for *bahūjīs* and *beṭijīs*, traditional historical sources highlight how *bahūjīs* assumed leadership positions as “Mājī Mahārāj” (mother Mahārāj) after their husbands – the Mahārāj – passed away. Using nineteenth century manuscript sources, early print material, and other historical texts from within the tradition I also demonstrate how the wives and daughters of Mahārājs were actively engaged in the production of devotional songs in the popular genres of *dhol-pad* and *garbā*.⁹⁴

Although the ritual and caste status of *bahūjīs* and *beṭijīs* differ from those of female lay practitioners, their modes of religious participation overlap in one significant way: both women from the Gosvāmī household and female lay practitioners produced *dhol-pads* and *garbās* in the vernacular languages of Gujarati, Hindi, and Brajbhāṣā. Puṣṭimārg lay women, moreover, continue to preserve, perform, and transmit these compositions through women-centered oral traditions. In an effort to contextualize our examination of the *vārtā*-hagiographies as well as our discussion of the performance genres in which Puṣṭimārg *bahūjīs* and *beṭijīs* composed, I begin by providing a brief outline of Puṣṭimārg literature more broadly.

⁹⁴ Examples of manuscript materials include *Kakko* (B.J. Institute, ms. 1088), *Kṛṣṇa-Ras* (B.J. Institute., ms. 6671), *Gupta-Ras* (B.J. Institute, ms.8511a), *Sevā-Vidhi-Utsav* (B.J. Institute, ms. 2177), *Puṣṭi-Sevā* (B.J. Institute, ms. 1089), *Padsaṅgrah* (Oriental Institute. 144.7357), *Vaiṣṇavnā Vasaṅt Holī Dhol* (Oriental Institute, ms.14359), *Vaiṣṇavnā Sevā Śṛṅgār* (Oriental Institute, ms. 14364).

Brajbhāṣā and the Vernacular in Puṣṭimārg

Vallabha, the founder of the sect, grounded himself in Brahminic authority and the *ācārya* philosophical lineage by composing all of his works in Sanskrit, including the *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*, his major theological work, the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*, sixteen treatises delineating his philosophical (Śuddhādvaita) and devotional (Puṣṭimārg) systems, and by writing commentaries on important treatises such as the *Brahmasūtras* (his *Anubhāṣya*) and on several cantos of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (his *Subodhinī*). His second son, Viṭṭhalanātha, also contributed to the Puṣṭimārg Sanskrit literary tradition by writing further commentaries on Vallabha's writings and through composing his own major works, such as the *Bhaktihetunirṇaya*, the *Bhaktihamṣa*, and the *Vidvanmaṇḍanam*. It was only in the third generation of the Vallabha-*kul* or hereditary lineage, with the figure of Gokulanātha (1552-1641) – the fourth of Viṭṭhalanātha's seven sons – that compositions began to appear in a language other than Sanskrit.⁹⁵ Although Gokulanātha continued to write commentaries in Sanskrit, he composed numerous texts in Brajbhāṣā, literally “the language of Braj.”

The Braj region or *maṇḍal* (“circle”), which includes Mathura, believed to be Kṛṣṇa's birthplace and Vrndavan, the home of Kṛṣṇa, refers to both the heavenly realm where Kṛṣṇa is said to be performing his eternal *līlās* (“sports”), and to its earthly manifestation, the region located in north India just south of Delhi. The Braj *maṇḍal* played an important role in the development of Vaiṣṇav-Kṛṣṇa sects in the sixteenth and

⁹⁵ Subsequent descendants of Viṭṭhalanātha, the most prolific being Puruṣottama, son of Pītāmbara (1668-1725), still continued producing commentaries and primary works in Sanskrit.

seventeenth centuries.⁹⁶ During this period followers of Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīyā Vaiṣṇav tradition in Bengal, made pilgrimages to the Braj region and mapped out different areas mythopoetically associated with the life of Kṛṣṇa.

By the turn of the seventeenth century Brajbhāṣā had become North India's most important literary and courtly vernacular language, that is, the language of classical Hindi literature (*rīti*). Celebrated Vaiṣṇav poets, such as Sūrdās and Tulsidās, had already composed devotional works in the language of Braj, believed to have been Kṛṣṇa's own native tongue. As Allison Busch illustrates, the imbricating processes of developing Vaiṣṇav religious cultures, the consolidation of Mughal rule during Akbar's reign (r. 1556-1605) – with its capital located close to the area of Braj – as well as Rājput sponsorship of temple constructions in the region facilitated both religious and courtly interest in the language. Meant for devotional singing, the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans* or *pads* of Vaiṣṇav poets were less formal in style and technique compared to the courtly context in which Brajbhāṣā flourished and rose to literary prominence: "...Brajbhasha was from the beginning a highly versatile poetic idiom that appealed to many people: used by Vaishnavas as a vehicle for devotion, it was transformed – and, the historical record suggests, suddenly and with great éclat – into a major court language from Akbar's day" (7).

As Busch indicates, in a time when theological and formal literary texts were still being composed in Sanskrit, several prominent figures in the Braj region, like Hit Harīvaṃś (1502-1552?), remembered as the founder of the Radhavallabha *sampradāy*,

⁹⁶ Presently, the most popular sects in the Braj region are the Puṣṭimārgīs, the Gauḍīyas, and the Rādhāvallabhs.

and his contemporaries Svāmī Haridās and Harīrām Vyās, began to write vernacular devotional songs in the genre known as *pad* (“foot” or verse) (27). They, along with poets like Sūrdās, wrote of Kṛṣṇa’s childhood *līlās* as well as the intense love and longing (*vīraha*) *gopīs* experienced for Kṛṣṇa. Through the medium of vernacular languages, the most cherished narratives from the ninth century Vaiṣṇav *magnum opus*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, were beginning to seep through the elitist grip of Sanskrit *pandits* to the everyday Vaiṣṇav public. Within the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which is dedicated to the life of Kṛṣṇa, the five chapters describing Kṛṣṇa’s dance (*rāsa-līlā*) or “love-games” with the *gopīs* of Braj, collectively called the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī*, have played a significant role in the theological and aesthetic development of Vaiṣṇav traditions.⁹⁷ It is, therefore, not surprising that the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī* was singled out and rendered in Brajbhāṣā by the middle of the sixteenth century by Hariram Vyas, who was the first *bhakti* writer to have done so. He is followed by the Puṣṭimārg poet, Nanddās (fl. 1570), and later by Bhupati (fl. 1687) (28).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha and other Puṣṭimārg thinkers, like Gokulanātha, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is counted amongst the most revered scriptures (after the Vedas, the *Bhagavat Gītā*, and the *Vedānta sūtras*). The largest section of Vallabha’s philosophical treatise, the *Tattvadīpanibandha*, is dedicated to his exegesis on the *Purāṇa*. In his commentary on one of Vallabha’s verse-treatises, “An Exhortation to My Heart,” Gokulanātha even proclaims the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to be a descent-form or verbal *avatār* of Kṛṣṇa (Redington 2013, 77-78). Furthermore, Puṣṭimārg theologians raise the *rāsa-līlā* chapters high above other Kṛṣṇa narratives. The *Subodhinī*, Vallabha’s commentary on several chapters of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (cantos 1-3, 10, and part of 11), is structured in such a way that the *rāsa-līlā* section is part of the sub-treatise on the “Rewards” of Puṣṭimārg *bhakti* (Redington 1990, 21). The very structure and style of the *Rāsa Pañcādhyāyī* reveals how the five chapters hold a special place within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As Schweig demonstrates, its poetic language is distinctive and its structure resembles that of a Sanskrit drama. Throughout the chapters, moreover, as many as eighteen other *līlās* from within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are recalled (2005, 15). The *rāsa-līlā* is anticipated as early as the third canto (BP 3.2.24), and is also the only narrative after which a benedictory verse appears declaring that if one hears and recites this story, one achieves supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa (BP X.33.36-39).

⁹⁸ A Gujarati rendition of the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī* by Nanddās in the *dhol* genre can be found in the second volume of *Vividh Dhol tathā Pad Sangraha* (Lallubhai Changlal Desai, 1913), pp.173-206.

If we return to Gokulanātha, who appears to have been active towards the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, it is now understandable *why* he would have chosen to write in the Brajbhāṣā language – a move that significantly departed from traditional Puṣṭimārg literary practices. By this time Brajbhāṣā was flourishing as the *lingua franca* of north Indian *bhakti* poets, and it was serving as the medium of classical courtly literary genres (*rīti*). Given the popularity of Brajbhāṣā as simultaneously a courtly and devotional language, Brajbhāṣā would have helped facilitate Gokulanātha’s project of vernacularizing Puṣṭimārg literature most successfully.⁹⁹

According to traditional accounts, Gokulanātha’s greatest contribution in Brajbhāṣā is the production of a “practical guide” to Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanātha’s teachings. This guide, according to Richard Barz (1994), took the form of a hagiographical collection of stories, *vacanāmṛt*, “nectar in speech,” which were then collected, ordered, and supplemented by commentaries into written accounts or *vārtās* (44). Among the *vārtā* hagiographical literature, the stories of the lives of the eighty-four disciples initiated by Vallabha, the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (CVV), is the oldest and is held in high esteem within the *sampradāy*. The CVV is also one of the earliest extended narrative prose compositions in any form of Hindi (45). In addition to the CVV, the tales of the two hundred and fifty-two (84x3) disciples initiated by Viṭṭhalanātha, the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (DSBVV), are also attributed to Gokulanātha and traditionally hold canonical status within the tradition.

⁹⁹ In his *History of the Sect of Mahārājas* (1865), Karsondas Mulji provides an extensive list of Brajbhāṣā texts, which are considered “as authorities by the sect” (97-98). The list consists of seventy-four Brajbhāṣā texts in total, thirty-nine of which are translations of Sanskrit works.

Although Gokulanātha is credited with the oral composition of the *vārtās*, which in all likelihood were transmitted to Puṣṭimārg laity in congregational settings, it remains uncertain when and by whom these narratives were put into writing. One popular opinion holds that Gokulanātha supervised his grand-nephew, the prolific Harirāy Gosvāmī (1590-1715!), in collecting and editing his oral narratives (46-47). In his commentary on the two collections of *vārtās*, known as the *Bhāv prakāś*, Harirāy describes the present life of each disciple in the context of three “births” or “lives”: their life before their initiation by either Vallabha or Viṭṭhalanātha, their life after initiation, and the life of each disciple as a participant in Kṛṣṇa’s eternal *līlā* in *Golok*, the Puṣṭimārgī heavenly abode (49).¹⁰⁰ Due to their rendition in a vernacular language such as Brajbhāṣā, these didactic tales of Puṣṭimārg devotees, which illustrate their exceptional devotion and spiritual transformation upon initiation, were more accessible as Puṣṭimārg teachings than any of the Sanskrit works of the *sampradāy*, such as the *Subodhinī*, the *Anubhāṣya*, the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ* and so on. For our discussion, especially, the *vārtās* also serve as an important source for understanding how the Puṣṭimārg tradition perceived of women’s devotional practices and roles in the sect, a subject which we now turn to.

The World of Women in the Puṣṭimārg *Vārtās*

The Brajbhāṣā *vārtā* literature can serve as an important heuristic lens through which we can map “women’s worlds” in Puṣṭimārg’s history. As didactic tales that

¹⁰⁰ As Vasudha Dalmia argues, Harirāy’s *Bhāv prakāś* or commentaries secured the rise of the *vārtās* to canonical status in the tradition. The *siddhānta* or axiom, which he drew from each narrative and each devotee’s life, articulated Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanātha’s teachings and authority. The *Bhāv prakāś* even introduces the *vārtās* as a *bhagavadvārtā* (“godly discourse”), “in stature and splendor higher than the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* itself, or Ācāryajī’s commentary thereof, the *Subodhinī*” (2001a, 132).

narrate the paradigmatic devotion of Vallabha's and Viṭṭhalanātha's followers, the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (CVV) and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (DSBVV) describe religious activities that Puṣṭimārg women have typically engaged in, such as the performance of domestic *sevā*, offering gifts to Puṣṭimārg *havelīs*, and organizing events with fellow Vaiṣṇavs. The *vārtās* also provide examples of female poet-composers, whose poetry is continued to be performed to this today.

As texts that stand at the intersections of social history and hagiography, the *vārtās* must be read through the dual perspectives of history and polemics. In keeping with the egalitarian rhetoric of “the *bhakti* movement,” the *vārtās* describe how Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha initiated men and women from lower castes and poor families.¹⁰¹ However it is important to keep in mind that the Puṣṭimārg *vārtās* were compiled and orally transmitted during a time when the tradition was not only continuing to attract new followers and expand its influence to parts of western India, but when the tradition was also in the process of consolidating and demarcating itself as a radically distinct *bhakti* sect. Therefore, like the hagiographical literature of other sectarian traditions, the *vārtās* constituted what Rupert Snell calls the “mechanics of propagation” (Snell 1). Although the hereditary leaders of the sect are Brahmin men, Puṣṭimārg's own “mechanics of propagation” eschewed and subverted Brahmanic orthodoxy and asceticism in favor of an emotionally engaging and personal devotional practice. Moreover, Puṣṭimārg stressed devotional practices that shifted away from the temple and instead centered upon the family and were located within the household. The rhetoric of domesticity – with its

¹⁰¹ From the narratives in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā* we can deduce that thirty-nine of Vallabha's disciples were Brahmin, thirty-six belonged to the warrior caste, five drew from the mercantile community, while six were *śudrās* (Saha 2004, 114).

emphasis on performing *sevā* in the home, preparing elaborate food-offerings, and worshipping Śrīnāthjī as a child – was undoubtedly an important vehicle for Puṣṭimārg community formation. “The family setting,” Vasudha Dalmia argues, “was important for the community. However, the family in its turn had to be amenable to integration within the greater social unit which was the community” (2001a, 135).

Examples of female initiates are interspersed throughout the *vārtās*.¹⁰² An important female figure in the religious imagination of Puṣṭimārg is the child-widow Ajab Kūvarī, whose life is briefly narrated in *vārtā* 98 of the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇav ki Vārtā*. As a child she is said to have lived with Mīrābāī in the town of Sinhād (present day Nathdwara), but soon left to become a disciple of Viṭṭhalanātha. Because of her earnest devotion, the *vārtā* tells us, Śrīnāthjī would come from his home in Braj to play a game of dice with her in Sinhād daily. Oral tradition attributes the reason for the permanent move of Śrīnāthjī to the town of Nathdwara out of his love for Ajab Kūvarī (Anne-Marie Gaston 1997, 51).

An important theme, which threads through many *vārtās*, is the subversion of Brahmanic authority and values, such as rules of ritual purity and pollution, caste status, and asceticism. Vallabha unequivocally questions and defies “*ved aur lok*, the norms laid down by the *dharmasāstras* and by custom” (Dalmia 2001a, 147) and *maryādāmārg* (“path of limitations”) – those practices characterized by *smārta* ritual and Vedic prescriptions.¹⁰³ This theme, on many occasions, is also connected to representations of

¹⁰² All the narratives are drawn from Dvarkadas Parikh’s editions of the *Cāurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2005, 5th edition) and the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (2004, 9th edition).

¹⁰³ Several *vārtās* from the CVV highlight Vallabha’s disapproval of renunciation. For example, *vārtā* 33 describes how Rāmdās Sāncorā, who apparently was inclined towards ascetic practices from a very young age, was forced to marry when he was nine years old. After meeting with Vallabha, he abandoned his wife

women’s exemplary devotion in the *vārtās*. For example, in the *Caurasī Vaiṣṇaav ki Vārtā*, Rukmiṇī, described as the daughter of a wealthy merchant (*śeṭh*) and follower of Vallabha, questions the ritual efficacy of bathing in the Ganges. In the *vārtā* (6.1), Rukmiṇī argues that one only bathes in the sacred river to fulfill “worldly desires” (*kāmnā*), while she is already “bathed in the *sevā* of Kṛṣṇā” (*maī to yāhī [sevā] bhānti nhāt ho*). As a demonstration of the superiority of Puṣṭimārg devotion over Brahmanic religiosity, the *vārtā* ends with Viṭṭhalanātha stating how the the sacred river-goddess Gaṅgā in fact “came to Rukmiṇī” (*gaṅgājī ne rukiminī pāī*) when Rukmiṇī passed away.

Another note-worthy *vārtā* in the same compilation (61) also illustrates a similar polemic vis-à-vis ritual purity. Vīrbāī, a woman who has just given birth, is in a state of ritual pollution. She does not perform *sevā* to Śrīnāthjī because of this but also laments the fact that no one else in the household is performing *sevā*. Śrīnāthjī appears before Vīrbāī and tells her that the rules of purity and pollution can be compromised in order to ensure the continuance of domestic *sevā*. Similarly, *vārtā* 9 narrates the tale of Mādhodās who keeps a prostitute, who he eventually abandons after speaking to Vallabha. Later, it is described how the prostitute waits for Viṭṭhalanātha to come to her town and initiate her into Puṣṭimārg. When he refuses, she decides to fast to death until he bestows her with her own *svarūp* for *sevā*. Viṭṭhalanātha concedes after seeing her steadfast devotion. However, soon other Vaiṣṇavs become upset when they realize she continues to perform *sevā* while menstruating. When Viṭṭhalanātha questions her about

to become a renunciant. When he returned home one day and again tried to leave his wife, Raṅchorjī (the *svarūp* in Dwarka) told Rāmdās that since he is now a disciple of Vallabha he cannot be selfish and must accept his wife. *Vārtā* 41 narrates the tale of two young men who, like Rāmdās, also tended towards renunciation when they were young. However, Vallabha explained to them how devotion to Śrīnāthjī and his *sevā* should take place “within the world and within the framework of family life” (Dalmia 2001a, 140).

this, she proclaims how she has had many masters before, but now, because of his grace, she has one true master, Śrīnāthjī. How can she abandon his worship? Viṭṭhalanātha saw how pleased Śrīnāthjī was with her *sevā* and allowed her to continue even in her state of impurity. However, he did note how her case was a special one; she was the exception to the rule of performing *sevā* in pure (*apras*) states. Another *vārtā* (5), where Brahmanic ritual orthodoxy is undermined in favor of *bhakti* to Śrīnāthjī, is one about a female practitioner by the name of Rājo. She is requested by Vallabha to bring *ghee* (clarified butter) for use in a *śrāddha* (ancestor ritual) ceremony for his father. Rājo repeatedly declines to provide the *ghee* to the Vaiṣṇav messenger who was sent by Vallabha. When she later brings food-offerings to Vallabha, he asks her how she could have cooked them without using *ghee*. It becomes clear that all along Rājo did have *ghee* but only enough to make offerings for Vallabha, her guru – which clearly took precedence over a “worldly” or Vedic custom like *śrāddha* (even if it was for Vallabha’s own father!).

In some *vārtās* it is made clear how traditional Brahmanic understandings of widowhood as inauspicious is also overlooked. These *vārtās* narrate the tales of women who are widows and perform *sevā* daily. One *vārtā* in particular (31) illustrates how it was only *until* a woman became a widow that Vallabha would grant her initiation. This was because her husband was not a religious man (“*bhagavat dharma ko dveṣi hato*”). Vallabha predicted when her husband would pass away – after she had two sons – and asked her to wait till then to come to him for initiation. *Vārtās* 42 and 60 also tell the tales of two widows, a Brahmin and a Kṣatriya respectively, who are also described as too poor to present adequate offerings to Śrīnāthjī during *sevā*. When other Vaiṣṇavs began to criticize the way the Brahmin widow from Adel performed *sevā* and how she

did not have the financial means to do so, (“...yah kachū ācār samujat nahī, kachū dravy nāhī...”), Vallabha silences them by commending her on the sincerity of her loving sentiments (*prīti*), rather than on the quality of her offerings: “...ācār, kriyā, dravyson, Śrīṭhākurjī prasan nāhī, Śrīṭhākurjī mē prīti cāhiye.” The *vārtā* narrating the devotional life of the Kṣatriya widow from Sinhad also makes a similar point. When the widow did not have enough money to buy proper materials for making food-offerings, she only made a few *rotīs* for Śrīnāthjī. She felt distressed for doing this and the next day decided to borrow money to ensure the adequate preparation of *sāmagrī*. Śrīnāthjī himself reproached her for borrowing money to make his food. He comforted her to not worry; he is content with her offering *rotīs* if that is all she can afford to do.

Like all hagiographies, the *vārtās* blur the boundaries between history and the miraculous. That is to say, on the one hand, the *vārtās* may serve as a useful hermeneutical framework for understanding the social history of Puṣṭimārg, its ritual traditions, and modes of female participation in the sect. On the other hand, the *vārtās*, as embellished didactic tales of Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanātha’s chosen disciples, also tell us something about what the tradition sought to idealize: the transformative power of initiation and (the fruits of) practicing sincere *bhakti* to Śrīnāthjī, Vallabha, and Viṭṭhalanātha. *Vārtā* 144 from the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā* demonstrates the supernatural abilities of a female *bhakta* who had become a disciple of Viṭṭhalanātha when she was a child-widow. When she grew very old she had the ability – with the grace of her *guru* – to see death approaching. On eight occasions, which coincided with different Puṣṭimārg festivals, she requested death to wait for a more suitable time to take her away from her body, for she needed it to continue her *sevā* of Śrīnāthjī. This *vārtā* not

only demonstrates the extraordinary abilities one is granted by becoming Puṣṭimārgī and performing *sevā*, but also how important it is to continue the performance of *sevā*, so much so that even death should – and can – be postponed.

In addition to *vārtās* which relate the miraculous, there are many *vārtās*, which I believe, reflect or can help shed light on women's religious lives in Puṣṭimārg's history. For example, in the CVV, *vārtā* 78 describes a wealthy Puṣṭimārg couple from Ujjain: Mavaji Patel and his wife, Birajo. Birajo is portrayed as a generous female patron, one who sponsors grand celebrations and feasts for Vaiṣṇavs, donates large amounts of grains to cows, and makes donations of jewels and clothes for ritual offerings at Puṣṭimārg temples in Gokul. This may be an indication of women's donative activities in Puṣṭimārg. Elsewhere, women are described as receiving initiation at the time of marriage if they are marrying into a Puṣṭimārg family (DSBVV 36), reading devotional literature (CVV 4, DSBVV 223) and performing *sevā* several times a day in their home. *Sevā* includes adorning Śrīnāthjī's shrine and image and offering all the meals cooked in the house first to Śrīnāthjī and then to the family. Śrīnāthjī is ultimately adored as a son and treated as a member of the household (see *vārtās* 4, 12, 15, 43, 44 from the CVV, and *vārtās* 27, 83, 195, 223 in the DSBVV).

In the DSBVV, there are also several *vārtās* that illustrate familial tensions that can arise when no one but the wife/daughter-in-law is Puṣṭimārgī. For example, *vārtā* 102 describes how a woman who was a long-time Puṣṭimārg follower married a devotee of the god, Rām. Even after marrying him, she continued to perform *sevā* to Śrīnāthjī. The *vārtā* describes how she also adorned the image of Rām as Kṛṣṇa by placing peacock feathers and a yellow shawl on him. Eventually they had a disagreement about the

superiority of Kṛṣṇa and Rām. Before the argument intensified, however, Śrīnāthjī interceded and blessed them both so that they no longer quarreled over such matters and could continue performing *sevā* to their deity of choice peacefully.

In the DSBVV, *vārtā* 27 provides a lengthy description of a family who eventually converted to Puṣṭimārg when they witnessed the earnest devotion of their daughter-in-law. When it initially dawned upon the daughter-in-law that her in-laws' home is devoid of any devotional activity, she vowed to not drink the water in the house and die. However, after praying to Viṭṭhalanātha and asking him to give her the courage to voice her desires (“...*ab to tum merī sahāī karoge to mero kahyo yāke man mē āvego*”), she asked her mother-in-law if she could have new utensils to prepare offerings and also requested that no one interfere with her *sevā*. Her mother-in-law agreed. The daughter-in-law then cooked every day, offering her food to Śrīnāthjī, and feeding the *prasād* (consecrated food-offerings) to her husband and in-laws. Everyone, including the mother-in-law was so moved by her devotion that they eventually received initiation from Viṭṭhalanātha. In this *vārtā*, by way of being an exemplary devotee, the daughter-in-law is ultimately presented as a woman who teaches her family about Puṣṭimārg devotion and ritual (“...*sab pranālikā tumhārī bahū tumhāre āge kahegī. Tab ve sagare ghar ke jo kachū kām karte so sab vā bahū sō pūchte. Tab jo bahū kahatī soī ve sab karte.*”).

Finally, if we turn to examples of female poets in the *vārtās*, in the *Caurasī Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā* we find the figure of Kṛṣṇadāsī who, although was initiated by Vallabha, became the maidservant of Viṭṭhalanātha's wife, Rukmiṇī, and lived in their house (*vārtā* 45). Kṛṣṇadāsī is described as being constantly absorbed in the mood of Kṛṣṇa (*bhagavad rasmē magan rahatī*), and in this state she would compose songs about

her experiences of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. Another example of a female composer comes to us from the *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇav ki Vārtā* in which Gaṅgābāī Kṣatrāṇī is born after her mother, Rūpvanī, dreamt that she made love to Viṭṭhalanātha. Gaṅgābāī Kṣatrāṇī is described as having written many *kīrtans* under the male pen-name of Śrīviṭṭhalgīridharan (*vārtā* 65). Even today we find examples of Gaṅgābāī's Brajbhāṣā poems in several *kīrtan* compilations, such as the *Kīrtansamgrah: Varṣutsav ke kīrtan* (*kīrtan* compilation for annual festivals) published in 1936, and in the large four-volume *kīrtan* collection used in *havelī* liturgy. In these anthologies, examples of *pads* written by Gaṅgābāī as Śrīviṭṭhalgīridharan are found for *Janamaṣṭmī badhāī* (felicitations for Kṛṣṇa's birth), and are composed in the *sāraṅg rāg* ("classical melody").

Brajbhāṣā compositions by figures like Gaṅgābāī, in specific *rāgs*, demonstrate how women produced poetry in Puṣṭimārgī canonical or classical genres, namely, that of *havelī kīrtan* or temple music. However, in the Gujarat context Puṣṭimārg women appear to have produced many more devotional compositions in the popular performance genres of *dhol-pads* and *garbās*. The authors of such songs have traditionally been the wives (*bahūjīs*) and daughters (*beṭijīs*) of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, while Puṣṭimārg lay women continue to remain the primary keepers and performers of such genres. Like the *vārtās*, *dhols* and *garbās* composed and sung by Puṣṭimārg women help illustrate the ways in which women have both participated in and contributed to living Puṣṭimārg religious cultures. I now turn to my discussion on the production and performance of Puṣṭimārg *dhol-pads* and *garbās* by first introducing the traditional roles and literary activities of *bahūjīs* and *beṭijīs* in historical contexts.

The Religious Roles and Literary Activities of *Bahūjīs* and *Beṭījīs*

For the most part, scholarly investigations of Puṣṭimārg have focused on the sect's Brahmin, male hereditary leaders, the Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs. As descendants of Vallabhacārya, the founder of Puṣṭimārg, Gosvāmīs are granted both the authority to initiate individuals into the tradition and to perform Puṣṭimārg *sevā* in temple (*havelī*) contexts. Moreover, they locate themselves in Brahminic authority by producing commentaries on the Sanskrit treatises written by Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and later Puṣṭimārgī theologians. As householders, Gosvāmīs are expected to secure the hereditary expansion of the Puṣṭimārg lineage by marrying women from outside the Vallabha *vaṃśa* or *kul* ("lineage"). If they are not already followers of Puṣṭimārg, newly married *bahūjīs* must obtain initiation (*dīkṣā*). The grooms of *beṭījīs* must also obtain *dīkṣā* before the wedding and, until recently, the husbands of *beṭījīs* would live with them in the Gosvāmī household.

As Brahmin women, *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* have traditionally observed *pardā*, remaining in the *zenānā* of *havelīs* or their homes most of the time. Their private, secluded lifestyles have made it difficult to document their social histories and their ritual and literary activities. The extent of *bahūjīs'* and *beṭījīs'* participation in the performance of temple *sevā*, therefore, is unclear. According to the current chief *mukhiyā* (primary temple officiant) of the Nathdwara *havelī*, both caste and gender rules prevented women from entering the main sanctum, thus excluding them from the performance of *abhiṣek* ("ablution"), *ārtī* ("waving of lamps"), and *sṛṅgār* ("adorning the *svarūp*").¹⁰⁴ However, in the event that the Gosvāmī passes away and has no male heir, biological or adopted, to

¹⁰⁴ Personal communication, December 29, 2007.

take on the leadership position, or if the son has not reached an appropriate age, *bahūjīs* are known to have acceded to the authoritative position of the Mahārāj. For example, Padmāvati *bahūjī* (ca. 1835-1882) took over both the administrative and ritual activities of the prominent Kankroli *havelī* in Rajasthan after her husband Gosvāmī Śrī Puruṣottamjī Mahārāj passed away. She commanded leadership of the *havelī* as Padmāvati “Mājī Mahārāj” for approximately thirty-six years during which she (and her *beṭījīs*) performed the daily *sevā* of Dvārakādhīśjī’s *svarūp*, maintained gracious and profitable ties with Rajasthan’s reigning families and patrons, and initiated individuals into the sect.¹⁰⁵

A contemporary example, enabled by the modern justice system, reifies the traditional practice of *bahūjīs* taking on leadership roles within the *sampradāy*. A court case from 1969 (which we came across in the last chapter) between Mahalaksmi *bahūjī* and Rannchoddas Kalidas in which the status of the Gokulnāthjī *havelī* in Nadiad was debated, demonstrates how a *bahūjī* has appropriated all the ritual and legal rights of a *havelī* after the death of her husband.¹⁰⁶ During the case, it is also mentioned how a lay

¹⁰⁵ Padmāvati Mājī Mahārāj is said to have initiated members from royal families including Baisahiba Rupkavari of Alvar in 1872, and Rajasthan’s *rājā* Mokhamsingh Raval in 1875. Additional historical information concerning the lives and activities of Mahārājs from the Kankroli *havelī*, including accounts about their relationship with the Mewar royal family, can be found in Kaṅṭhmaṇi Śāstrī’s large compilation entitled *Kāṅkrolī kā Itihās*, published in 1932. Using information from private manuscript collections in the Kankroli *havelī* library, Mewari land grants, and unpublished Sanskrit texts, Śāstrī’s *Kāṅkrolī kā Itihās* serves as an important source for the history of Puṣṭimārg in Rajasthan.

¹⁰⁶ There are several additional legal examples of a *bahūjī* representing the interests of the Vallabh-*kūl* and that of her *havelī*. One is a Gujarat High Court case between Daniraiji Vrajlalji vs. Vahuji Maharaj Chandraprabha on 16 April, 1970. *Bahūjī* Chandraprabha, the widow of Purusotamlalji Raghunathji Gosvāmī of the Junagadh *havelī*, was attempting to revoke the adoption of Vrajlalji that was made after the death of her husband. Another case, which took place in the Bombay High Court on June 17, 1937, was between Kamala Vahuji Maharaj vs The Collector of Bombay. Kamala *bahūjī* filed a suit against the Collector’s Office, contesting the legality of an assessment made by the office on land belonging to her in Bombay. The land was granted to Gosvāmīs of the Kutch *havelī* in 1788, and was thus inherited by later descendants leading up to Kamala *bahūjī*.

devotee, Vasant *bāī* had her will executed in 1897 in which she made two bequests, one to the Gokulnāthjī *havelī* and another in the name of “Maharāṇī” *bahūjī* (“Queen mother”), the female leader of the Gokulnāthjī *havelī* at the time.

If we turn to another popular North-Indian Vaiṣṇav *sampradāy*, the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇavs of Bengal, we find an analogous practice in place. Hagiographical sources of the sect illustrate how Sitādevī, the principal wife of the conservative Brahmin thinker, Advaita Ācārya, became the defacto leader of Advaita Ācārya’s followers after his death. Advaita Ācārya, who was born decades before Caitanya (b. 1486) is traditionally remembered as one of Caitanya’s prominent disciples and as a figure who helped facilitate the rise of Caitanya as the leader of the Gauḍiyā movement (Manring 1998; 2011). Although several of Advaita Ācārya’s followers accepted Sitādevī as their new leader, many orthodox practitioners were concerned over the possibility of Sitādevī initiating male disciples. According to Rebecca Manring, Sitādevī, herself, assured would-be disciples that she would only be able to provide spiritual instruction to her female followers (2005, 196). Jāhnavā Īśvarī, the second wife of Nityānanda – Caitanya’s other well-known and more liberal-minded disciple – also took on a leadership role when he passed away. However, unlike Sitādevī, Jāhnavā initiated male disciples, starting with Vīrabhadra, the son of Nityānanda’s first wife (who also was Jāhnavā’s sister). By becoming Vīrabhadra’s *guru*, Jāhnavā inaugurated and secured the lineage of Nityānanda’s followers, and is remembered as a woman who solidified ties between the Vaiṣṇavs of Bengal and the leaders in the Braj area (Brzezinski, 67-68; Wulff 1997, 68).

One could argue that examples of Puṣṭimārg *bahūjīs* – or Gauḍiyā theologians’ wives – taking on the ritual and administrative leadership of religious lineages after their

husbands pass away is not exceptional, since their accession can be understood through the logic of inheritance practices. And though it is important to point out such historical incidences, we should be careful not to romanticize these as evidence of women’s “equal status” in religious traditions. In this context, women’s leadership roles are contingent upon their husbands’ inability to rule; they are *appropriating* authority, which ultimately rests in the figure of male Gosvāmīs.

What can perhaps be considered remarkable, however, is an instance when the daughter of a Mahārāj takes on the leadership position.¹⁰⁷ The figure of Yamunā *beṭījī* (ca. 1669-1730), better known as Yamuneśprabhujī among her contemporary followers in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, is perhaps the only *beṭījī* who took on the leadership role of “Mahārāj” in the history of the Puṣṭimārg tradition.¹⁰⁸ Her early dates make it difficult to extract historically verifiable data from later hagiographic materials such as her *jīvan carits* or “life stories.”¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, according to these *jīvan carits*, in 1684 at the behest of a well-known Puṣṭimārgī disciple by the name of Kṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭ, the un-married Yamunā *beṭījī* is said to have ascended to the *gaddī* (“seat”) of her late father, Gosvāmī Gopendraprabhujī, in Dungarpur, Rajasthan. Rājā Jaswantsimgh Rāval of Dungarpur is

¹⁰⁷ Again, in the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇav context, a similar occurrence takes place when Hemalatā Ṭhākuraṇī, the daughter of Śrīnivās Ācārya – one of the principle leaders of the “second generation” of Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇavs and a contemporary of Jānhavā – began to initiate disciples (Brzezinski 72-73).

¹⁰⁸ Today, in Gujarat and Rajasthan, the followers of Yamunā *beṭījī* belong to a sub-sect of the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy*, known popularly as the Gopālpanth. Since Yamuneśprabhujī, the only *beṭījī* who has assumed an authoritative position such as that of a Mahārāj is the contemporary figure of Indirā *beṭījī* Gosvāmī (b. 1939). Indirā *beṭījī* Gosvāmī, a prominent *beṭījī* who never married, maintains her own *havelī* – the Vrajdhām *havelī* in Baroda, and to the disapproval of male Gosvāmīs she also initiates individuals into the sect. Indira *beṭījī* draws parallels to the figure of Yamuneśprabhujī herself, and is a guru figure for hundreds of female disciples. Today, she is the centre of an ever-expanding global community of Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇavs.

¹⁰⁹ Yamuneśprabhujī’s hagiography are found in several contemporary Gujarati reprints including *Śrī Jamuneś Svarūpāmṛt* (1992), *Śrī Jamuneś Jaśano Sāyo Arth* (1994), *Śrī Jamuneś Caritāmṛt* (2000), and *Śrī Jamuneś Mahāprabhujīnā Jīvan Caritāmṛt* (2002). For the purposes of this section, the *Śrī Jamuneś Mahāprabhujīnā Jīvan Caritāmṛt* serves as my primary source.

said to have consecrated the event by placing a *tilak* on her forehead, bestowing upon her the title of *Tilkāyat* (“leader”) (Figure 1). The *carits* go on to describe how she undertook pilgrimages all around Rajasthan and Gujarat, giving talks on Puṣṭimārg theology, performing various miracles, and even initiating individuals into the tradition. In emphasizing how Yamunā *beṭījī* was perhaps the first female of the Gosvāmī household to step outside the *zenānā* and assume such an authoritative role, her hagiographic accounts also describe how she dressed in the manner of a male Gosvāmī and “even rode horses”.¹¹⁰ Although such an event, of a *beṭījī* assuming leadership status, is unprecedented in the history of Puṣṭimārg, it can perhaps be legitimized by the fact that she is the daughter of a Gosvāmī and therefore a rightful descendent of Vallabhācārya. Furthermore, since she did not marry she preserved her position as a part of the Vallabh-*kūl* or family. This is a strategy that is used by Indira *beṭījī*, a contemporary figure whose actions resonate with the historical Yamunā *beṭījī*. By never marrying, yet remaining and living in her own home/*havelī* surrounded by her entourage of female devotees, Indira *beṭījī* hovers between an ascetic-householder lifestyle. This certainly helps her mitigate her authoritative and controversial status as an influential Gosvāmī figure in the Puṣṭimārg community.

¹¹⁰ *Śrī Jamunēś Mahāprabhujīnā Jīvan Carītāmṛt*, 14.



Figure 1. Contemporary lithograph portraying the consecration of Yamunā *beṭījī* as Tilkāyat by Rājā Jaswantsimh Rāval.

Turning to the literary activities of historical women from the Vallabh-*kul*, although they are part of an orthodox Brahmin household, women from these families are described as being able to know how to read, at the very minimum, by the mid-nineteenth century. In his testimony during the libel case (February 27th 1862), Jadunathji Mahārāj states how “The wives and daughters of the Maharajas read books in the Brij Bhasha” (MLC 344). As we discussed in chapter three, in the Bombay presidency, women’s public education – both in English and in vernacular languages – only began in earnest in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Certainly, no daughter or wife of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs attended these schools. In fact, males from these families also perhaps did not begin attending public education institutions until the twentieth century. The *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* of Gosvāmīs were, therefore, most likely exposed to Puṣṭimārg literature and learned how to read and write in their household, and via their male counterparts.

One is tempted to ask if Brahmin women in Gujarat or in the Bombay Presidency during the nineteenth century (or perhaps even earlier) were more likely to be literate if they were part of a devotional community such as Puṣṭimārg. Again, if we turn

to the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇav tradition, Donna Marie Wulff argues precisely this – that it *is* in the Vaiṣṇav context that literacy among women has been very high, at least in the Bengal region. “The Caitanya movement,” Wulff explains, “with its great outpouring of Sanskrit and vernacular literature, appears to have served as a powerful stimulus to literacy” (1985, 222). She claims that the Vaiṣṇav community can be distinguished from other religious communities of Bengal due to the high rate of literacy among its female mendicants, which was even noted by British officials in the early nineteenth century (1997, 69-70). Extant Sanskrit works and vernacular poetry composed by women starting from the sixteenth century demonstrates that non-mendicant women from the leading Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇav families were also participating in the production of literature.

In the social histories of these two north Indian Vaiṣṇav communities, what parallels can be drawn in terms of women’s presence and modes of participation? We already discussed how the widows of leaders in both *sampradāys* assumed authoritative roles. Women from both communities, whether they were the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs or were lay practitioners, also composed literature in the form of devotional poetry. It would, however, be difficult to mirror Wulff’s argument and claim that it was in the Vaiṣṇav context of the Puṣṭimārg community that the women of Gujarat became literate. A significant difference between the two *sampradāys* is the presence of learned female mendicants in the Gauḍiyā sect. Since Puṣṭimārg does not ascribe to an ascetic worldview there has been no prevailing tradition of renunciation practised by members of the Vallabh-*kul* or by the lay community, as we observe in the Jain and Svāmīnārāyaṇ sects of Gujarat.

Furthermore, in the Gauḍiyā context, in addition to Sītādevī and Jāhnavā, who took on leadership roles in the sect, the tradition’s hagiographical material also illustrates how certain females, such as Śacī and Viṣṇupriyā (the mother and wife of Caitanya, respectively) were admired by the early community and are continued to be revered by Gauḍiyās today. Although there are many women who are mentioned in the Puṣṭimārg hagiographical (*vārtā*) literature as the devotees of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha, I do not believe there are analogous to the figures of Śacī and Viṣṇupriyā. None of the figures in the *vārtās* are held in especially high esteem nor do they have shrines dedicated to them. Similarly, historical *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* are also not revered in the same way as some of the wives and daughters of Gauḍiyā leaders are (with the exception of Yamunā *beṭījī* and Indirā *beṭījī*).

With respect to female composers of devotional poetry and songs, although both *sampradāys* certainly appear to have active female poets and writers, there are no Puṣṭimārg or Gauḍiyā equivalents of Janābāī, Muktabāī, and Bahiṇābāī of the Vārkarī tradition, Akkā Mahādevī of Vīraśaivism, Āṅṭāl of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, Karaikkālammaiār of the Tamil Nāyaṇārs, or a Mīrābāī. A distinction, therefore, has to be made between female *bhakti* poets who have risen to the status of sainthood, on the one hand, and female poets more generally. Foregrounding the lives and literary practices of extraordinary female poet-saints is certainly important, however, scholarly emphasis on such figures has come at the expense of silencing the voices of numerous “ordinary” female poet-*bhaktas* – those who do not “defy social norms and taboos,” “overturn models of femininity,” or “overturn caste hierarchy” (Ramanujan 1982, 318-319). It is these every-day female disciples, who are married, have children, and yet continue to

demonstrate their devotion to Śrīnāthjī through producing and singing devotional compositions that constitutes the subject of the following section.

Locating *Dhol* and *Garbā* in the Historiographies of Gujarat and Gujarati Literature

In Gujarat, *dhol-pads* and *garbās* constitute the most popular performance genres in which *beṭījīs* and *bahūjīs* have composed their devotional songs. Francoise Mallison (1986, 1989, 1996) provides a history of the *dhol-pad*, describing it as an “old folkloric” (1996) form belonging to the *pad-bhajan* genre, and also discusses the performance of *dhols* by Puṣṭimārgī women in Gujarat. According to Mallison, *dhol* comes from the Sanskrit *dhavala*, meaning “white” (*dhavala* > *dhaula* > *dhola*), and represents a kind of panegyric found in Prakrit and Apabramsha literature, and is also present in later post-Apabhramsha, Old Gujarati and Medieval Gujarati, as well as Rajasthani literature.¹¹¹ Neelima Shukla-Bhatt corroborates this by explaining how the origins of *dhol* or *dhavalgīt* can be found in the *rāso* poetry in Gurjar Apabhramsha, the language of Gujarat before the development of the Gujarati language. *Rāso*, she explains, was a long poem divided into short sections of varying length, and was meant to be sung.¹¹²

¹¹¹ The Gujarati literary historian, H.C. Bhayani, describes *dhavala* in Gujarati and Rajasthani literature as “a song, a panegyric, in praise of a person for whom some ceremonial occasion is being celebrated. Wedding songs constitute a special class of Dhavalas, and the Dhoḷs sung in the Vallabhaita Vaiṣṇava sect make up another class” (1988, 99; 1993, 91). He also acknowledges how in contemporary times, the scope of the application of the term “dhol,” compared to the earlier use of “dhavala,” has been extended to include Purāṇic and social themes, “and the lines of distinction between Pad, Bhajan, Garbi and Dhoḷ have become blurred” (1988, 100; 1993, 92).

¹¹² Shukla-Bhatt has noted that some of the earliest *dhavalgīts* appear in a twelfth century poem, *Bharateśvar Bahubali Rāso*, composed by a Jain monk. Personal communication, October 13th, 2009.

Different communities and castes, Mallison argues, “have their own *dhol* and their own specific way of singing them” (1989, 88). *Dhols* also do not have a fixed form nor do they necessarily have known authors, and even though they can have difficult rhythm patterns, they do not always follow set tunes and styles of singing. Combined with the fact that they have circulated in primary oral forms, *dhols* constitute fluid genres that have remained difficult to define.

Like *dhol*, *garbā* (pl. of *garbo*) is also a popular performance genre in Gujarat. The word *garbo* traditionally denotes a perforated round clay pot with a lamp inside symbolizing (the womb of) the Goddess, Devī. The term also refers to the popular ritual dance performed by mostly women in open spaces around the *garbo*, or around any other image representing Devī (Shukla-Bhatt forthcoming; Mallison 1989, 91n.16; Thompson 1987, 170).¹¹³ The dance is performed especially during Navarātrī, the nine-night goddess festival in the Hindu calendar month of Aśvin, and during other auspicious occasions such as weddings, pregnancy rituals, the birth of a child, and so on. Finally, the songs which women sing while performing the ritual dance are also called *garbā*. With the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in Gujarat, *garbās* have moved beyond their traditional Śākta context and have come to include songs about Kṛṣṇa, describing his *līlās* and the love between him and Rādhā and the *gopīs*.

¹¹³ A more “vigorous” form of the dance is performed by men and is known as *garbī*. The songs on which men perform this dance are also called *garbī* (Thompson 172, 177). Mansukhlal Jhaveri, in his *History of Gujarati Literature* (1978), explains that the terms *garbā* and *garbī* are used interchangeably, however, he does note some differences between the two: “Garbo is longer than garbi. The metrical tune of the garbo is different from that of the garbi. Garbi dilneates a single emotion or feeling; while garbo describes a person, an event or an object... Most of the garbas of the mediaeval period are related to the devotion of Mata; while most of the garbis of the period are related to the love between Krishna and Radha or Gopis” (248-249). Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, on the other hand, describes *garbī* as we understand *garbā*: “A garbi means a song or poem generally recited by ladies” (1914, 35). For this reason, I do not distinguish between *garbā* and *garbī*, unless the author I am referencing does so. I use the term “garbā,” more broadly, to denote this genre of popular Gujarati song and dance.

Historical texts, such as Behramji Malabari's *Gujarat and the Gujarātis* (2nd edition, 1884) and Alexander Forbes' *Rāsmālā* ([1878] 1973), provide nineteenth century descriptions of women singing popular genres such as *garbās* during religious festivals in Gujarat. Here Malabari – who, we should note is a Parsi reformer – offers a general overview of the “native singing” practices of Gujarat as follows:

“At home it is incumbent on every Hindu – man or woman – to sing a few snatches of devotional music at stated hours...Hindu women also sing what we call season songs, at times sitting, at times in a circular dance, with rhythmic hand-clapping. There is music to celebrate birth, marriage, etc. Much of it is good and wholesome, tinged with religious ideas, with superstitious, and at times demoralising associations” (307-308).

Although it is clear from these descriptions that he is discussing the performance of *garbā*, elsewhere, Malabari does specifically refer to *garbā*:

“The nine nights [Navarātrī] are sacred to *garbās*, popular songs sung in the street of Gujarāt... a bevy of from twenty to sixty women of all ages circle round and round, taking up a refrain, and often repeating in chorus a verse sung by one and, at times, two women, keeping time to the clap of hands. These *garbās* are evanescent scintillations of the genius of Dayaram, the Byron of Gujarat. The hero of the songs is mostly Krishna” (338-339).

Finally, in typical reformist fashion, Malabari ultimately ties the erotic themes of such performance genres to the debauchery of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmī:

“This harmless legend [of Kṛṣṇa] is worked by Dayaram into various orgies of songs whose luscious sweetness and witchery of style have done more than any other social vagaries to perpetuate the horrors of those dens of iniquities, the Vaishnava Maharajas' Mandirs. In this respect Dayaram's poetry works in Gujarat as ‘procuress of the lords of Hell’” (339-340).

Another historical source, which provides examples of women's singing practices in late nineteenth-century Gujarat is Alexander Kinloch Forbes' *Rāsmālā* ([1878] 1973). Again, during the festival of Navarātrī, Forbes describes how “people, walk or dance, clapping their hands and singing songs” around an earthen vessel, pierced

with numerous holes and containing a light (613). Forbes also provides examples of women singing during weddings: “Their songs are usually poetical compositions in honour of Seetā or Rookmune, the wives of Rām and Krishn, or else ludicrous and not unfrequently obscene stanzas” (623), as well as a description of women’s “labor songs,” sung by the wives of cultivators as they, too, toil the land. Forbes provides a full translation of a song called “The Koonbee’s Grievs,” which is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, and which describes the hardships and struggles of farmers (543-544).

Scholarly texts on Gujarati literature, such as Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri’s *Milestones in Gujarati Literature* (1914) and his *Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature* (1924), as well as Mansukhlal Jhaveri’s *History of Gujarati Literature* (1974), offer very brief histories and descriptions of performance genres like the *garbā*. There is in fact little to no reference found on the *dhol* genre in such texts.¹¹⁴ Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri (1914) notes how the celebrated fifteenth and sixteenth century poets of western India, Mirābāī (1499-1547) and Narsimha Mehtā (1414-1480), are among the earliest *bhakti* writers to have composed devotional poetry on Vaiṣṇav themes in the Gujarati language. He provides a terse description of the performance of popular genres such as the *garbā* when he describes how Mirābāī’s songs, which “on the surface seem to be mere erotic verse,” are sung by mothers and daughters “in the Garbās” (35).

Elsewhere Jhaveri illustrates how the poet Vallabh Mevaḍā Bhaṭṭ (fl.1700), who hailed from Ahmedabad, wrote many *garbās* in praise of the goddess Bahūcharājī and also composed several on Kṛṣṇa-related themes (1914, 149-151). It is here that

¹¹⁴ In his discussion on the various types of genres in which poets and writers composed, Manusukhlal Jhaveri simply lists “dhol” as one amongst these genres, without offering further information. Composers of *dhol* include Pritamdas (1720?-1798) and Dhiro (1753?-1825) (50-52).

Jhaveri provides another short indication of women singing and dancing *garbā*, which according to him is an activity “most indulged in” during Navarātrī in cities like Surat, Baroda, Ahmedabad, and Bombay.¹¹⁵ Mansukhlal Jhaveri also indicates how, before Vallabh Mevaḍā Bhaṭṭ, no *garbās* of earlier writers seem to be available; Vallabh Bhaṭṭ is, therefore, considered the earliest and most distinguished writer of *garbās* in this early period (48). A later poet, Raṅchhoḍjī Diwān (1785-1841), who served as the *diwan* of Junagadh, is also remembered for his *garbās*. Both Raṅchhoḍjī and Vallabh Bhaṭṭ, Mansukhlal Jhaveri argues, “are the two poets whose garbas had captured the minds and hearts of Gujarati women” (55). Finally, Dayārām (1776-1852), who was a follower of Puṣṭimārg, is listed as the last of the major poets of “medieval” Gujarati literature and, in terms of his literary output he is held on par with his well-known predecessors, such as Premānanda (1636-1734) and Śāmal Bhaṭṭ (1690-1769).¹¹⁶ Dayārām composed works of prose, *pads*, *caritra kāvyas* (biographies, such as *Mīrān Charitra*, a poem narrating Mīrā’s life), “dialogues,” poems elaborating the tenets of Puṣṭimārg, and *garbās* and *garbīs*.¹¹⁷ Despite having such a prolific output, Mansukhlal Jhaveri insists that Dayārām

¹¹⁵ Jhaveri (1914) notes the names of other authors who composed *garbās/garbīs* dedicated to Kṛṣṇa and/or the goddess. These include Pritamdās (1730), Raṅchhoḍ Bhaṭṭa (1804), Raṅchhoḍjī Divān (1768-1841), Raghunāthdās (19th century), Shāntidās, Devānand, and Dayārām (1767-1852) (159; 192-197; 206-207; 239-249). In his later book, *Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature* (1924) he describes the writer and friend of Alexandar Kinloch Forbes, Dalpatram Dhayabhai, as a composer of many *garbīs* (“verses intended for girls and women”) as well as wedding songs (26).

¹¹⁶ Rachel Dwyer acknowledges that 1852, the date marking the death of Dayārām, is late to be termed “medieval.” The designation of medieval in this context, she argues, should be understood in the widest possible sense to mean “pre-British period” (2001, 5).

¹¹⁷ Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri enumerates Dayārām’s publications as follows: forty-eight works in Gujarati, forty-one in Brajhbhāṣā, seven thousand “miscellaneous” *pads* in Gujarati, twelve thousand in Brajhbhāṣā, two hundred in Marathi, forty in Punjabi, fifteen in Sanskrit, and seventy-five in Urdu (1914, 239). As a well-known Puṣṭimārgī poet, Dayārām helped with the process of disseminating Puṣṭimārg theological and philosophical themes in a vernacular language such as Gujarati. Some of the most important Puṣṭimārgī philosophical works written by Dayārām in Gujarati include the *Rasikvallabha* (“The Beloved of Connoisseurs,” 1838) and the *Puṣṭipatharahasya*. In the *Rasikvallabha*, which is structured as a dialogue between a teacher and pupil, Dayārām introduces important Puṣṭimārg doctrines such as the nature

is best known for his *garbīs*, which celebrate the love between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and the *gopīs*. And although writers before Dayārām have composed *garbīs*, “...it was Dayaram who brought the form to perfection and created many masterpieces distinguished for their superb lyricism” (64).

With regards to the presence of female poets, Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in his *Milestones in Gujarati Literature*, does offer short descriptions of female authors. However, he prefaces his discussion by stating how no female poet can be “named in the same breath with the Rajput Queen of Mewad,” that is Mīrābāī, yet they did manage to “turn[ed] out verses of a very mediocre, if not of quite an inferior quality” (209). Jhaveri mentions a Brahmin widow, Divali *bāī*, who became a pupil of a religious teacher by the name of “Dādā Guru Bhagavān.” Divali *bāī* wrote approximately five-hundred poems on themes and narratives drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic (211). Another Brahmin female poet, Radha *bāī* (1834-1857), was the disciple of a guru named Avadhutnath. Jhaveri notes how Radha *bāī* wrote in a language “which is neither unadulterated Gujarati, Marathi, nor Hindi. It is a curious mixture of the three, and unless one knows all the three languages, it is difficult to follow her” (212). Based on his description, she appears to have been a Vārkarī follower, for in addition to composing *garbās* on Vaiṣṇav themes she also wrote biographies of saints like Jñāneśvar and Tukarām. Krsna *bāī*, another Brahmin poet, composed several poems including *Kṛṣṇahalraḍī* (“Lullabies for Kṛṣṇa”) and *Sītājīnī Kāncalī* (“The Bodice of Sītā”), which according to Jhaveri are well-known

of Brahman, the *jīvā*, and *māyā*, as well as the importance of *bhakti* (Dwyer 2001, 31). The *Puṣṭipatharahasya* advocates for the worship of Vallabha and his descendents. Dayārām also composed a Gujarati *dhol* describing the lives of Puṣṭimārg *bhaktas* from the *vārtās*, titled *Vaiṣṇavnuṃ dhol*. His *ākhyāns* (“narrative poems”) and *padamālās* (“string of poems”) draw on popular stories from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, including Rukmiṇī *vivāḥ*, Satyabhāmā *vivāḥ*, *bāla līlā*, and *rūpa līlā* (32).

to women across Gujarat (213). Finally, Jhaveri mentions two more female poets: Puri *bāī*, who is known for her poem on the marriage of Sītā (*Sītā Maṅgal*), and Gāvri *bāī* (b.1759), another Brahmin widow, who led an ascetic lifestyle and wrote philosophical verses. Jhaveri describes her as the “only Vedanti poetess in Gujarat” (214).¹¹⁸

Very little information is provided about *dhols* and *garbās* in English-language historical texts on Gujarati literature. However, it is clear from such sources that although *garbās* and *dhols* were composed by the celebrated male poets of Gujarat, these genres were most often sung, remembered, and passed on by women. Women have traditionally been the experts and authorities of these popular genres, singing *dhols* and *garbās* during social gatherings together with other women (such as during *satsaṅg* groups), or while performing domestic chores, during pilgrimage or congregational settings, and at auspicious occasions such as Navarātrī, weddings, pregnancy rituals, or births (where they are called *dhol-maṅgal*).

Locating *Dhol* and *Garbā* in Puṣṭimārg

In Gujarat, there are *dhols* and *garbās* found in the Jain, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇav traditions. In the Vaiṣṇav context, much like the Brajbhāṣā *pads* discussed above, *dhol-pads* and *garbās* have enabled the transmission of epic and *purāṇic* narratives – most often drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – through their rendition in a more simple language that can be understood by all, including women and children. In the Vaiṣṇav setting, Mallison defines *dhol* as a kind of *bhakti* song, “sung in the Gujarati

¹¹⁸ Sonal Shukla, in her essay on women *sant* poets of Gujarat (1989), discusses the life and oral poetic compositions of three additional female poets, Gaṅgasatī, Toral, and Loyal. According to Shukla, all three sang of *nirguṇa bhakti*, “with a touch of Sufism” (65).

language and to a *deśī* tune, with the function of praising God in order to earn *punya* ‘merit’” (1989, 90). In Gujarat one finds *dhol*s in the vernacular languages of Hindi, Gujarati, and Brajbhāṣā; even if they are in Braj, however, it is not the courtly *bhāṣā* of *rīti* literature.

In the Puṣṭimārg context, more specifically, one way of characterizing *dhol*s and *garbās* under the larger rubric of Puṣṭimārg performance genres is by distinguishing them from their elitist counterparts: the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans* of *havelī* liturgy. The *kīrtan* repertoires, which are performed as ritual service in *havelīs*, constitute another category of Brajbhāṣā religious literature of significance in the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy* in addition to the *vārtās*. Among the thirty to forty poets whose compositions are found in the Puṣṭimārg temple *kīrtan* repertoires, the most celebrated and revered composers are the *aṣṭachāp* (“eight-seal”) poet-saints believed to have been initiated into the sect by Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha.¹¹⁹ Since the time of Viṭṭhalanātha and his earliest descendants, the *kīrtans* of the *aṣṭachāp* along with the compositions of other poets, which are in the form of short *pads* or poetic verses, have been set to elaborate *rāgs* (“classical melodies”) and have become integrated as part of daily *havelī sevā*. The *pads* vary thematically but are performed with the specific aim of capturing the *rasa* (mood) of each of the eight daily *darśans* or *jhānkis* (“viewing period”), festival, and/or season in

¹¹⁹ The first four poet-saints initiated by Vallabha are Kumbhandās, Sūrdās, Kṛṣṇādās, and Paramānanddās; Viṭṭhalanātha is said to have initiated the last four: Nanddās, Govindasvāmi, Cittasvāmi, and Caturbhujadās. According to Milieu Ho (2006) the *aṣṭachāp* became prominent in the tradition with the composition of the seventeenth century *Śrīnāthjī kī prākāṭya vārtā* (“The Manifestation of Śrīnāthjī”), which describes the eight poet-saints as descending on earth with Śrīnāthjī in order to sing his praises (199). The hagiographies of the *aṣṭachāp* along with other composers are found in the CVV and DSBVV. In his extensive study of the poet-saint Sūrdās, Hawley (1984) interrogates Puṣṭimārg’s claim that Sūrdās was a disciple of Vallabha and argues, how over time, the *sampradāy* appropriated the literature of Sūrdās to augment the sect’s influence and reputation. Whitney Sanford (2008) has conducted an extensive study on the works of the *aṣṭachāp* Paramānanddās.

havelīs.¹²⁰ By virtue of their integral role in temple liturgy, as well as their “classical” style of performance, the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtan* repertoires have acquired canonical and an elite status within the tradition. Their preservation and performance over the centuries by a hereditary lineage of male singers and musicians (*kīrtankārs*), moreover, accords the *kīrtans* with liturgical legitimacy and authority over the other category of Puṣṭimārg vernacular performance genres. As we have seen, in the Gujarat context, the most popular of these performance genres include Gujarati *dhol-pads* and *garbās*, performed mostly but not exclusively by females in the sect.

Mid to late nineteenth century sources indicate that several *bahūjīs* and *beṭijīs* were engaged in producing devotional writings in the vernacular languages of Hindi, Gujarati, as well as Brajbhāṣā.¹²¹ Sundarvantā *bahūjī*, the wife of the prominent Puṣṭimārg theologian, Harirāy (b.1590), is perhaps the earliest figure whose writings are found today.¹²² She composed devotional songs in the languages of Gujarati and Brajbhāṣā using the pen-name “Sundardāsī” or “Dāsīsundar” (Caturvedi 57). However, the majority of writings come from figures who lived towards the mid to late nineteenth

¹²⁰ From the time of Viṭṭhalanātha and his descendents, the *sevā* of Śrīnāthjī in *havelī* contexts has been structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as *jhāṅkis* (“glimpses”). Each *jhāṅki* represents a moment in Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*, from his waking up (*maṅgalā*), eating his mid-day feast (*rāj-bhog*), to wandering in the pasture with cows and his friends (*gvāl*). In larger *havelīs*, during each *jhāṅki*, ritual musicians perform the *kīrtanas* of the poets, backdrop paintings (*picchavāīs*) are hung, and food offerings (*bhoga*) are placed before the *svarūp* to invoke the mood of each respective *līlā*. Ho explains how the *kīrtans* in the standard, four-volume compendium in use today in all *havelīs* (*Puṣṭimārgīya Kīrtan Saṁgrah*, 1867) can be divided into the following categories: *nitya* (daily), *utsav* (festivals), *baddhāī* (felicitations for birthday), *malhār* (rainy season), and *dhamār* (spring season). The songs are in turn organized according to the chronological order in which they are to be sung in the day and year, their theme or liturgical function (during a particular *jhāṅki*, for example), and the *rāg* in which they are sung (2006, 205).

¹²¹ *Kakko* (B.J. Institute, ms. 1088); *Padsamgrah* (Oriental Institute. ms. 144.7357).

¹²² A well known *dhol* composed by Sundarvantā *bahūjī* is called “*Cintannu Dhol*.” It can be found in printed form on its own (*Cintannu Dhol*, 1977) or included as part of larger *dhol* compilations such as *Puṣṭi Ras* (2004), and in volume two of the popular collection, *Vividh Dhol tatha Pad Saṁgrah* (Desai 278-288). In his published doctoral thesis, *Gosvāmī Harirāyājī aur unkā Brajbhāṣā Sāhitya* (1976), Vishnu Caturvedi briefly discusses the literary activities of Sundarvantā *bahūjī* and provides a few examples of her *dhol-pads*.

century, including Sobha *bahūjī* from the Śrī Gopināthjī *havelī* in Porbandar, Ratnaprabha *bahūjī* and her daughter Rasikpriya *beṭījī*, also from Porbandar, and Yasoda *beṭījī* from Motamandir in Surat.¹²³ Their literary compositions – which were likely passed down orally and only written down later – are found in the popular oral poetic genres of *dhol-pads* and *garbās*.

Today, a significant source of Puṣṭimārg *dhols* and *garbās* written by Ratnaprabha *bahūjī* and Rasikpriya *beṭījī* is the large collection entitled “*Rasik Kaumudī*” (1968). Examples of songs written by Sobha *bahūjī* and Yasoda *beṭījī* can be found in several compilations including *Paṇḍar Garbā* (2004), *Śrī Śobhāmājī Kṛt Nav Garbā* (nd), and *Prācīn Dhol-Pad Saṁgrah* (1963, 6th edition). In the latter collection, the *Prācīn Dhol-Pad Saṁgrah*, edited by Champaklal Chabildas Nayak, one finds several *dhols* composed by Yasoda *beṭījī* using the pen-name “Nijjan.” Examples of *dhols* include “Śrī Yamunā Darśan,” which describes the beauty of the river-goddess Yamunā (28); “Śrīmathureśjī nu dhol,” a *dhol* describing the adornment of the Mathureśjī *svarūp* (63); “Śrīmadvallabh Gher Pragaṭyā,” a song celebrating the birth of Viṭṭhalanātha (158); and, “Śrī Sāth Bālako Na Dhol,” a *dhol* which narrates the birth and life of Viṭṭhalanātha’s seven sons (165-168). Finally, another important text in which one can find *dhols* and *garbās* composed by Puṣṭimārg *bahūjīs* is *Vrajsudhā* (2009, 2nd edition). This collection contains songs written by Vrajpriya *bahūjī* and Kamalpriya *bahūjī*, the grand-mothers of the contemporary figure, Raja *beṭījī*. Raja *beṭījī* is the aunt of Tilak *bāvā* or Madhusudhan Gosvāmī from the Natvarlāl Shyāmlāl *havelī* (first house) in Ahmedabad. Much like

¹²³ Both Sobhamājī and Yasodabeṭījī, according to Mallison, lived in the nineteenth century and belonged to the family of the Gosvāmī of the sixth *gaddī* (house) of Surat (1989, 93fn. 23).

other compendiums, *Vrajsudhā* contains *dhols* and *garbās* which describe the qualities of the river-goddess Yamunā, praise the virtues of Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and members of the Vallabha-*kul*, and has songs for festivals such as Kṛṣṇa’s birth (*janamāṣṭmī*), Holī, and *hindolā*. There are also numerous *dhols* extolling the beauty of the Natvarlālī *svarūp*’s adornment (*śṛṅgār*), as well as *dhols* meant for singing while performing the *sevā* of Natvarlālī, such as *dhol maṅgalnu*, *dhol śṛṅgār*, *dhol bālīlā*, and *dhol rājbhog* (33-39).¹²⁴

Puṣṭimārg *dhol-pads* and *garbās* differ in mode and style from *havelī kīrtans* – with *kīrtans* being set to specific *rāgs* – and they can also be distinguished by way of their performance and transmission through gender- and space-specific milieus – for example, *kīrtans* are taught and sung by male *kīrtankārs* in *havelī* contexts while *dhol-pads* and *garbās* circulate predominantly among women in domestic spaces.

Thematically, however, *dhols* and *garbās* have much in common with the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtan* repertoires. Both genres include songs which praise Śrīnāthjī and the river-goddess Yamunā, describe the beauty of *śṛṅgār* decorations of different *svarūps*, narrate the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, and extol the qualities of Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and their descendants.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Kamalpriya’s poems are also found in other collections such as the *Prācīn Dhol-Pad Saṅgrah* (1963, 6th edition) and *Dhol Pad Sāgar* (1972, 4th edition).

¹²⁵ For example, in volume one of the large collection, *Vividh Dhol tatha Pad Saṅgrah* (Desai 1913), chapter three contains *dhols* in praise of the river-goddess Yamunā; *dhols* in chapter four describe the adornment (*śṛṅgār*) and qualities of Śrīnāthjī and other *svarūps*; chapter five contains Gujarati *dhols* and Brajbhāṣā *pads* celebrating the birth of Kṛṣṇa (*janamāṣṭamī*); chapters six to nine contain *dhols* extolling the virtues of Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and later descendents of the Vallabha-*kul*.

An example of a *dhol*, “Dhol Svarūpvarṇan,” describing the *svarūp* of Śrīnatvarlālī is provided below. It is composed by Kamalpriya *bahūjī* (translations are my own):

*Śrīnaṭvarlālne re ke nirkhū nayanbharī
guṇ gāū tamārā ke nitprati nem dharī |1|
cho sundar śāṇā re, ke bālkiśor vaḷī
nand āṅgaṇ ṭādā re, ke pag nūpur dharī |2|
gaḷe guṇj birāje re, ke saḥaj siṅgār karī
śir pāg gulabī re, ke candrikā ek dharī |3|
Śrījamunājīne tīre re, ke bhaktnī bhīḍ ghaṇī
gvalnī saṅg khelo re, ke kar genduk dharī |4|
nikunjnā nāyak re, ke ānand khel karī,
Kamalpriyā guṇ gāy re, ke cit carṇe dharī |5|
(Vrajsudhā, 50)*

I fill my eyes with the vision of Śrīnatvarlāl
I sing this song in your praise, always |1|
Oh Natvarlāl, you are so beautiful
Standing in Nanda’s garden, your feet adorned with ankle bells |2|
A garland around your neck, your natural beauty
Wearing a pink head-dress, adorned with the moon |3|
Near the banks of the Yamunā river, you are surrounded by your devotees
Playing a game of ball with your young friends |4|
Prince of Braj, your līlā delights all
Kamalprīyā sings your praises, in whose heart your lotus feet dwell |5|

Another example of a song, which is meant for singing during the Holī festival is called “Raṅg raṅg re.” It is composed by Ratnaprabhā *bahūjī* (under the pen-name “Kumudinī”):

*Raṅge rame re, raṅge rame re, śyāmā Śrīnāthjī sū raṅge rame
raṅge bhare re, raṅge bhare re, śyāmā Śrīnāthjī ne raṅge bhare |1|
sāmsāmī nen bāṇ chhūte picḥkārīo,
kiṅśuk gulāb rase bharī dharī jāriyō,
pec pānc bhāv bharyā maṇḍun hare re - śyāmā |2|
abīl gulāl taṇī bharī vaḷī jāriyō,
āspās dodthī ahīrataṇī choriyā
chalbalśū chel taṇe pūṅṭe phare re - śyāmā |3|
Kumudinī kiśor tame hāryā, hū jīthī,*

hoḍāhoḍ paraspar pragat thhathī prīti,
e chhabī nihālī kāj sahunā sare re...śyāmā |4|
(*Rasik Kaumudī*, 190)

They are playing with colors, they are playing with colors Śrīnāthjī and Śyāmā, what are they playing with colors
Fills him with colors, fills him with colors, Śyāmā fills Śrīnāthjī with colors |1|
They exchange glances sharp as arrows, and color burst out of the *pichkāri* (water gun)
Water pots are filled to the brim with the sap of the *kinśuk* and rose trees,
Five types of feeling fill, agitate, and enchant the mind - Śyāmā |2|
Large pots are filled with the perfumed red colors of Holī,
Girls of the *ahīr* caste run close together,
Why all this deceit and these tricks - Śyāmā |3|
Kumudinī says, Kṛṣṇa you've lost and I've won,
In this game, love manifests itself in fairness
You've shown this form for the sake of everyone ...Śyāmā |4|

Although they are not composed by female authors specifically, there are also other *dhol*s that summarize the tenets of Puṣṭimārg and which narrate the lives of the devotee-saints from the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās*.¹²⁶ By rendering important Puṣṭimārg themes into a language for all to understand in Gujarat, *dhol-pads* and, similarly, *garbās* form “the nucleus” of Puṣṭimārgī literature in the Gujarati language (Mallison 1989, 93).

One of the primary reasons it is difficult to locate authors of *garbās* – and especially *dhol*s – is because these genres have circulated and persisted through oral traditions, especially by way of their continual performance by women. Due to their simple form and language, and their embeddedness in women's cultures, such popular performance genres have generally been over-looked by scholars like the Jhaveris in their historical readings of Gujarati literature. Within the Puṣṭimārg context, moreover, both

¹²⁶ In volume one of the *Vividh Dhol tatha Pad Saṁgrah*, there is a *dhol* rendition of one of Vallabha's well-known Sanskrit treatises, the *Siddhāntarahasya* (part of the *Śoḍaṣagrāntha*), called *Siddhāntarahasyanu Dhol* (Desai 1913, 105). *Dhol*s listing and narrating the lives of the eighty-four and two-hundred and fifty-two disciples of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha, respectively, are also found in the same collection: *Śrī Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavnu Dhol* and *Śrī Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavnu Dhol* (Desai 1913, 359-378).

traditional scholars and western academics have not paid much attention to *dhol-pads* and *garbās* because they are not sung in *havelīs* and are not found in the canonical and elitist language of the tradition, Brajbhāṣā.

The prevalence of these genres in a sectarian tradition like Puṣṭimārg has enabled the preservation – and, indeed, the standardization – of these popular oral genres to a large extent, especially with the advent of print technology by the mid-nineteenth century in Gujarat when many of these songs began to appear in printed form.¹²⁷ By the twentieth century, *dhol-pads* and *garbās*, along with popular Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans*, appeared in small booklets or large compendiums, which have been circulating in Puṣṭimārgīs’ private collections. In addition to the collections mentioned above, a very popular compilation which I was continuously advised to turn to is the two-volume *Vividh Dhol tathā Pad Saṁgrah*, edited by Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai. It was first published in 1913 in Ahmedabad and the collection has been reprinted several times since then.¹²⁸

Additional collections include the *Dholpad Sāgar* (1972, 4th edition), and the *Prāchīn Dhol-pad Saṁgrah* (1962, 6th edition). In many of these texts, Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans* are interspersed among Gujarati *dhols* and *garbās*. Although the *rāg* for each *kīrtan* is provided, lay practitioners, with no training in classical music have continued to sing these *kīrtans* in their own spontaneous mode of devotional singing, choosing a style and

¹²⁷ Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri indicates how Durgaram Mehtaji’s purchase of a lithograph press from Bombay in 1842 was perhaps the first of its kind in all of Gujarat. However, he also makes reference to the Mission Press of Surat, which was founded in 1817, pushing the introduction of print technology in Gujarat to an even earlier date (1924, 12). In Ahmedabad, the first two lithographic printing presses, Bajibhai Amichand’s press and the *Pustak-vridhhi-karnar-mandali*’s press, were established in 1845. By the 1860’s, twenty-one presses had been set up in Ahmedabad, producing publications in Gujarati, Hindi, Sanskrit, English, and Marathi. As Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Seth note, the publications of this period mostly consisted of books on religious and mythological themes, folktales, medieval poetry, books on “ancient civilizations,” and so on (2011, 129-130).

¹²⁸ See footnote 125 for a chapter breakdown of Desai’s *Vividh Dhol tathā Pad Saṁgrah*. Another hymnal edited by Desai is the *Vaiṣṇavonā Nitya Niyamnā Pāṭh* (1986).

tune they may have learnt from other females, such as elder women in their families or from women during *satsaṅg* gatherings.

Although both the *kīrtan* repertoires and *dhol-pads* and *garbās* can be characterized as Puṣṭimārg “performance genres,” that is, part of Puṣṭimārg oral traditions, and they certainly share similar themes, they differ in several important ways: (1) language – *kīrtans* are only in Brajbhāṣā; (2) style of singing – *kīrtans* are sung in specific *rāgs*; (3) gendered modes of production and preservation – *havelī kīrtans* have been composed and performed by men, and transmitted through a hereditary lineage of male artists; and, finally, (4) the spatial and temporal contexts in which they flourish – *kīrtans*, for the most part, are sung in *havelīs* and during *darśan* periods. The standardization and preservation of the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans* by way of a written repertoire (the four-volume *kīrtan saṃgrah* in use in all *havelīs* today), classical style of singing, and transmission through a hereditary male lineage together mark the Brajbhāṣā *havelī kīrtans* as part of Puṣṭimārg’s *fixed* oral tradition (Doniger 1991). Unlike the elitist, canonical genre of *havelī kīrtans*, *dhols* and *garbās* represent the popular *fluid* oral tradition of Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism in Gujarat. Less static, these genres have persisted by way of their continual performance by women in the home during *sevā*, in *satsaṅg* groups with other women, during auspicious festivals and occasions, and *in between darśan* periods on *havelī* grounds. The songs, which can be in Gujarati, Hindi, or Brajbhāṣā, and which do not necessarily have to adhere to a fixed style and mode of singing, have been shared among Puṣṭimārgī women and passed down from mother/-in-law to daughter/-in-law in families, and were either memorized or transcribed by literate women. As Mallison argues, *dhols* – and by extension, *garbās*, as performance genres can be

characterized by their function, rather than the author’s name or their form: “The considerations which justify their existence and provide for their classification are when, where, by whom or for which occasion they are sung” (1989, 89fn7).

Dhols and Garbās as Women’s Song Genres

On the one hand, it is clear that *dhols* and *garbās* serve a similar “function” as the *havelī kīrtans* in that they are first and foremost devotional songs – sung as offerings to, and in praise of, Śrīnāthjī. On the other hand, as fluid genres that have been sung, remembered, transmitted, preserved, and indeed have even been written by women, I suggest that *dhols* and *garbās* can also be included as part of the larger repertoire of “women’s song” genres, which are popularly characterized as “folk songs” or *lok gīt*. These songs are sung primarily by women during marriage ceremonies, the birth of children, during mourning ceremonies, while performing domestic or land labor, and during seasonal and festive occasions such as Holī (Raheja 1994, 1995; Raheja and Gold 1994; Mukta 1999; Jassal 2012; Narayan 1997; Trawick 1988; Flueckiger 1991; Banerjee 1989b). Although I am using “women’s songs” in its broadest connotation, I am conscious of the caste, class, and communal differences that index the performance of such genres. For example, “songs of labor” such as the *kajlī* genre are sung by low caste female agricultural laborers in the Jaunpur district of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Jassal 72). Similarly, Margaret Trawick discusses songs such as *eṭṭappāṭṭu*, sung by lower caste and untouchable Paraiyar laborers, and *kummipāṭṭu* (“hand-clapping” songs) also sung by women from these communities in Tamil Nadu (198). On the other hand, genres such as *pakharu* are sung by mostly upper-caste women – Brahmin, Rajput, *mahājans*, or *sūds* –

in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh in north western India (Narayan 1997, 26).¹²⁹ As we will discuss in the next chapter, in my own field work among Puṣṭimārg women from the *baniyā* or *bhāṭiyā* communities, in addition to caste affiliations, class status also informs participants' claim to specific genres. This is demonstrated by upper-class women's rising interest in taking *havelī kirtan* lessons and the desire to sing them in their "proper *rāg*."

Much like other women's song genres, there are Puṣṭimārg *dhols* and *garbās* for weddings, religious festivals, and for seasonal occasions – but which, of course, articulate a Vaiṣṇav ethos.¹³⁰ Although, at times, specific authors can be found for Puṣṭimārgī *dhols* and *garbās*, their characterization resonates with Margaret Trawick's definition of "folk song": "...a 'folk song' is distinguished from other kinds of songs principally by the recognition (on the part of both singers and folklorists) that such a song is not the property of a single author, but is itself as divisible and recombining – as collectively owned, or as unowned, we might say – as the persons who gave their voices to it" (1988, 212). Their folkloric nature, as well as their transmission among groups of women, mark *dhols* and *garbās* as public genres, in contrast to the more "confined" *kirtans* of Puṣṭimārg *havelīs*. However, as Kirin Narayan argues, since it is individuals

¹²⁹ As Kirin Narayan explains, *pakharu* are about "married life from a woman's point of view... They describe an in-marriage bride's longing for her family of birth; a bride's mistreatment by in-laws in a joint family; and most centrally, a bride's relationship with a husband who, more often than not, is absent" (Narayan 1997, 26).

¹³⁰ So for example, during weddings in north India when the groom's side (the *barāt*) are about to depart with the bride, the family of the bride, the "wife-givers," sing songs of insult, *gāliyan*, addressed to the family of the groom, the "wife-takers." In another large compendium of *dhols* and *pads* edited by Lallubhai Desai, the *Gokuleśjinā dhol tathā padsamgrah* (1916), there is a chapter entitled *Vivāh utsav* or "Wedding Festival" (chapter nine). It is not clear if the songs in this chapter are meant to be sung during weddings. However, the names mentioned in these songs are of members from the Vallabh *kul* and unlike popular wedding *gāliyan* songs, these songs are devotional in tone.

who preserve and transform such oral traditions, they can also be viewed as private: “an artifact of an individual’s memory and aesthetic pleasure” (1997, 27).

In addition to the fact that *dhols* and *garbās* are sung by women, a reason why I propose to include these genres amongst the larger category of “women’s songs” is because of the subtle social commentary one finds in these devotional pieces with regards to kinship ties, domestic tension, and gender roles. In collections like the *Rasik Kaumudī* (1968) and *Vrajsudhā* (2009) one finds a plethora of *dhols* and *garbās* where the heroine (*nāyikā*) exclaims to Śrīnāthjī how she cannot stay with him much longer because her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and/or husband will scold her if she remains away from the house. Other themes involve the heroine inviting Kṛṣṇa at a time when her female elders and husband are not present, asking Kṛṣṇa to wait for her until she is able to sneak out of the house (where she is under the constant surveillance of her elders), or proclaiming that she will be able to withstand the criticism of her female elders and husband if she can have a glimpse of Kṛṣṇa. I present a few examples of such *dhols* and *garbās* from these collections below (all translations are my own):

“Madhuvannī Vāṭ”

Madhuvan vāṭe, yamuṇā ghāṭe, rokī vrajnī nār, natvar! jāvā de
Hū albelī, chelchabīlī, naval gujar nānī nār chū,
Have karonā āṭlī vār – natvar! jāvā de |1|
Kamalnayan aḍṣo nā mujne, nājuk māri bhāy che,
Piyu! Dekhe gopkumār – natvar! jāvā de |2|
Kumudinī dāsī, thay udāsī, durijan kero trās che
sāsuḍī deśe gā! -- natvar! jāvā de |3|
(*Vrajsudhā* 117; *Rasik Kaumudī* 158)

At the forest’s edge, on the banks of the Yamunā, you accost the women of Vraj!
let me go,
I’m a beautiful, carefree young woman of the Gujar clan,
Now don’t take so long, Naṭvar! Let me go |1|

Lotus-eyed one, don't touch me! My arms are delicate
My love! The cowherd men are watching, Naṭvar! Let me go |2|
Kumudinī dāsī is distressed, such is the plight of the poet
My mother-in-law will hurl insults at me, Naṭvar! Let me go |3|

“Mārā Chel Gumānī Śyām”

*Mārā chel gumānī śyām re pyārā pālav mūkone,
sāsu amārī khījse vhalā, naṅdal deśe gāl,
vātene ghāte rokī rahyā cho, māro paraṅyo chadave āḷ re |1|
khātū che goras ājanū vhalā, mīthū hū lāvīs kāl,
saṅgnī sahelī sarve gaī, pyārā hū chū nānerū bāl re |2|
prīṭ prakāṭ nā karīye vhalā, prakāṭ kiye ras jāy,
Nijjannā e nāth vinā, mune bīje na āve vhal re |3|
(Vrajsudhā 112)*

My proud and beautiful Śyām, let go of the edge of my sarī, my dear
My dear, my mother-in-law will become angry, and my sister-in-law will insult me
You're blocking my path at the river bank, my husband will be full of rage! |1|
Today's buttermilk is sour, my love, but tomorrow will bring sweetness
My friends have all gone, my love, I'm only a young girl |2|
Keep our love hidden, my love, once revealed the relish disappears
Nijjan can't find love with anyone other than that lord of all creatures |3|

“Mārā Chel Chabilā Pyārā”

*Mārā chel chabilā pyārā! māre mandir āvone!
Mārā madanmohan laṭkāḷā! māre mandir āvone!
mārā ghar pacchvade dvare, sajanī ek ūbhī rākhśū,
jīno sād karī bolāvo, māre mandir āvone! |1|
sāsu-naṅandal to nav jāne, piyujīthī paṅ chānū rākhśū,
mārā tannā tāp samāvo, māre mandir āvone! |2|
rajnī ramśun thālam saṅge, manmā mod ghaṅerā lavśū,
mīthī morlalḍī saṅbhāvo, māre mandir āvone! |3|
āvo Kumudinī nā pyārā! phūḷḍiyānī sej bhicchāvśū,
komal kar mujne parsāvo, māre mandir āvone! |4|
(Rasik Kaumadi, 57-58)*

My beautiful love! Come to my temple!
Naughty Kṛṣṇa, beautiful as the god of desire! Come to my temple!
I'll keep a friend on guard at the backdoor to my house,
Call to me softly, come to my temple! |1|
My mother-in-law and sister-in-law don't have a clue, and it will be hidden from my
husband as well,

Immerse yourself in the firey desire of my body, come to my temple! |2|
In the night I will play with my love, we will bring much happiness to our hearts
Let me hear the sweet sound of your flute, come to my temple! |3|
Come, beloved of Kumudini! We will lay out a bed of flowers,
Draw your soft hands towards me, come to my temple! |4|

“Śrī Yamunājīne Kāṅthade”

*Śrī Yamunājīne kāṅthade māre ramvā javū rās,
pyārā prītamjīne pās,
bānsarī bajavī mārī pūrī mannī āś,
pyārā prītamjīne pās,
sāsu roke, naṅadī roke, roke sahū sansārī,
mohanvarne maḷvā chālī, vyākuḷ thāī vrajnārī - pyārā |1|
avaḷā tho ābhūṣaṅ pheryā, avaḷā ambar oḍyā,
nānakdā baḷakne melyā pāraṅiyāmā poḍya - pyārā |2|
chāndā kerī chāndnī ne śaradpūnamnī rathe,
Rasik prīthamśū raṅge ramiyā sahelīne sāthe - pyārā |3|
(Rasik Kaumadi, 61-62)*

Near the banks of the Yamuna river, I wish to play *rās*
with my dear beloved,
The sweet sounds of his flute fulfill my desires,
with my dear beloved,
My mother-in-laws stops me, my sister-in-law stops me, the whole world stops me,
I still go to see my beloved, this woman of Vraj is anxious – beloved |1|
I’ve adorned and draped myself
I’ve placed my child to sleep in a basket-swing – beloved |2|
On the night of the full moon, the moon’s rays fill the sky
Together with her friends, Rasik played with her beloved |3|

Such songs are meant to invoke the paradigmatic devotion of the *gopīs* or Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa, as well as serve as a metaphor for all disciples’ relationship with the divine. However, *garbās* and *dhols* such as these, I suggest, like other folk songs, can also shed light on themes such as marriage, sexuality, patriarchy, and the possibilities of female agency. Although many of these *dhol-pads* and *garbās* are composed by the *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* of the Gosvāmī household, references to gender roles and expectations

echo and resonate with the domestic realities of female lay practitioners, who are the primary keepers and performers of such songs. The theme of a heroine fearing she may be reprimanded for seeing Kṛṣṇa can be read into the lives of Puṣṭimārg lay practitioners. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the practice of *sevā* by contemporary females in urban settings, as well as their participation in Puṣṭimārgī-related social activities, can indeed cause tensions to arise in the relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws and husbands and wives. This is due either because the newly married daughter-in-law feels obliged to be initiated into Puṣṭimārg and to perform *sevā*, or as the poems illustrate, women are perceived as investing *too* much time in their ritual activities at the expense of abandoning their domestic responsibilities, such as attending to their husbands, in-laws, and children. Having said that, looking for “cultural truths” in these songs is not my aim here. As Kirin Narayan reminds us, scholars are always in “the danger of reducing texts to ethnographic artifacts, overlooking the subjectivity and agency of performers. Women’s ‘voice’ refers not just to the spoken word, but also to perspectives on social relations that frequently go against the grain of representations stemming from dominant (male) groups” (Gal 1991, 178 qtd. in Narayan 1997, 46).

In some *satsaṅg* gatherings I attended where women come together to sing *dhols* and *garbās* songs such as the ones provided above, which invoke family tensions between the heroine and other female kin, solicited boisterous laughter from all the women singing and even prompted some to stand up and re-enact the behavior of a dutiful daughter-in-law/wife by drawing the drape of their *sārīs* over their faces (Figure 2). Devotional songs are not just about the relationship between devotees and the divine; they can also become moments and mediums for articulating women’s shared realities

and emotions, whether it is desire, feelings of loneliness, the stifling pressures of domestic responsibilities, and familial tensions between themselves and their husbands and joint families. Attending Puṣṭimārg *satsaṅg* is, of course, a mode of religious participation for all Puṣṭimārgī women. However, *satsaṅg* gatherings are also occasions where women can experience momentary reprieve from male surveillance – as well as from female surveillance in the form of their mother-in-laws and sister-in-laws. Ridiculing an over-bearing mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and husband are topics that are normally taboo in most social contexts. However, through singing songs/lyrics in which women’s points of view are given privilege, women are able to voice personal experiences – to “speak bitterness” (Jasall 36) – without having to articulate any private grievances. A.K. Ramanujan, as always, expresses this notion succinctly: “these [songs]...present an alternative way of looking at things. Genders are genres. The world of women is not the world of men” (1991, 53). Indeed, participating in *satsaṅg* gatherings and singing such *garbās* and *dhols* does hold religious value. However, such activities can also carry cathartic significance and can help engender and sustain communal bonds between Puṣṭimārgī lay women.



Figure 2. While singing *dhols* and *garbās* some women begin to dance and pull the drape of their *sārīs* over their faces.

In this Chapter I have attempted to outline a social history of women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg by turning to the sect’s traditional sources: the hagiographies which narrate the religious lives of female lay disciples, and the devotional poetry composed and sung by *bahūjīs*, *beṭījīs*, and lay practitioners. Although, as we will explore in the following chapter, the contemporary practices of Puṣṭimārgī female laity have resonances with the past, I am not suggesting historical continuity or arguing for “an unbroken tradition” of female participation within the sect. Colonial modernity, reform movements, the expansion of global capitalist economies, and the emergence of the urban middle-class/bourgeoisie reconstitute our understandings of the domestic space, women’s roles in the home, and the production of sectarian identity. It is, therefore, useful to think about Puṣṭimārg women’s domestic ritual practices in light of these processes. In fact, the topics covered in this Chapter – the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās* and Puṣṭimārg women’s devotional

singing – were the subject of vitriolic critique by Bombay Presidency reformers like Karsondas Mulji and Behramji Malabari in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. In an effort to connect our discussion on the *vārtās* and Puṣṭimārgī women’s song genres with our larger conversation on gender, class production, and the perpetuation of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities today, I provide a brief overview of how the *vārtās* and women’s performance cultures became implicated in nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements.

Vārtās, Women’s Songs, and Obscenity in Colonial Bombay

Throughout the Mahārāj Libel Case, the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās*, which we have seen are traditionally held on par with the Sanskrit works of Vallabha and hold canonical status in the sect, were used to *delegitimize* Puṣṭimārg as an “authentic” Hindu tradition on both historical and literary grounds (since they are not “ancient” like the Vedas and the *dharma-sāstras* and *sūtras*, and are not in the Sanskrit language). Some of the narratives from the *vārtās* were also purposefully invoked during the trial in order to reify the reformist reading of Puṣṭimārg as an immoral and vulgar sect.¹³¹ Furthermore, Karsondas Mulji, in his *History of the Sect of Maharajas* (1865), exclaims how during so-called *rās maṇḍalīs* (“carnal love meetings”), individuals gather at the home of some “orthodox and rich Vaiṣṇavas” and read the stories from the *vārtās* (129). “The reading of these books,” Mulji argues, “excites and stimulates the passions, and we may be prepared to expect what must follow” (129). In response, as we saw in the last chapter, Jadunathji Mahārāj did zealously attempt to locate Puṣṭimārg textual authority in the

¹³¹ See page 131-132.

sect's Sanskrit sources, such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Vedas. In his testimonies during the libel case, Jadunathji frequently oscillated between acknowledging the sacred status of the *vārtas* and dismissing their value altogether.

It is difficult to ascertain how such reformist activities influenced the ways in which lay practitioners approached the *vārtās*. Reformers from the community, as well as leaders of Puṣṭimārg, did call for a return to the “original” writings of Puṣṭimārg, such as Vallabha's Sanskrit commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, his *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*, or even texts like the *Gītā* (Sampat 1938 qtd in Simpson, 100). Gosvāmīs and Puṣṭimārg theologians also engaged in a series of lecture tours and drew on Vallabha's Sanskrit works (Shodhan 2004, 180). Classes and workshops were mobilized to teach Puṣṭimārgīs, especially the young, what constituted “real” Puṣṭimārg theology, and readable commentaries on Sanskrit works were attempted to be made more accessible to the lay community (Saha 2004, 310). However, does this mean that Puṣṭimārgīs, who most likely grew up in a household where elders read the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās* and where women gathered for *satsaṅg* in which the narratives were discussed and sung, abandoned their engagement with the texts? I do not think this is the case. Institutionally, in the *havelī* context, during *kathās* or in other congregational contexts, the *vārtās* may have receded to the background in favor of an exegesis on Puṣṭimārg Sanskrit works – and even on texts like the *Gītā* – but it does not seem likely that the same occurred in the every-day context of lay followers' lives.¹³²

¹³² To this end, Emilia Bachrach's forthcoming dissertation entitled “The Living Tradition of Hagiography in the Vallabh Sect of Contemporary Gujarat” will be of significant value for understanding Puṣṭimārgī lay practitioners' engagement with the *vārtā* texts.

More so than the *vārtās*, Puṣṭimārg women’s singing practices during festivals like Holī, *hindolā*, and in front of Gosvāmīs at the *havelī* or in the lay practitioner’s home, became the object of vociferous criticism throughout the nineteenth century. In their tirade against Puṣṭimārg, reformers such as Karsondas Mulji cited “indecent singing” by family women in their list of debasing activities performed by members of the *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities, which also included the practice of consulting astrologers, inviting “prostitutes” for performance of music and dance, wasting money on Vaiṣṇav temples, and so on (Motiwala 179). The erotic *gopī bhāv* themes of Puṣṭimārgī *dhols* and *garbās* – in which Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as a lover of married women, is asked to sneak into their homes while the heroines’ family is away, or is chastised for not fulfilling their desires – flared the Victorian, upper-caste patriarchal sentiments of male reformers. In the Puṣṭimārg context especially, where the Gosvāmī metonymically “stands-in” for Kṛṣṇa and to whom many of these songs can, therefore, be addressed further reified reformist claims to the immoral nature of both women’s singing practices and the sect as a whole. In his *History of the Sect of Maharajs* (1865), Mulji provides examples of *garbā* songs, which he argues excite “the gross passions of these priests, for whose pleasure, and to stimulate whose lusts, they [lay women], upon these visits and also on festive occasions, sing” (109). Furthermore, in the libel case, the testimony by one of Mulji’s supporters, Mathooradas Lowjee, illustrates the general outlook reformers had of women singing during weddings and festivals as well as the singing of devotional songs to Gosvāmīs: “Licentious songs are sung by females on occasions of marriage; but when they are addressed to the Maharajas, the females singing them wish for carnal intercourse with them” (MLC 277-283). Lowjee, in line with the reformist agenda, sees

this as a sign of the general ignorance of women from the community: “If the Bhattias of Bombay were educated at all, such adulteries would not prevail amongst them”

(Motiwala 283). Finally, even in his final verdict on the libel case, Judge Joseph Arnould commented on the “adulterous” nature of women singing:

“The hymns sung by the women of the Vallabhacharya sect in honour of the Maharajas and in their presence ... are passionate with all the passion of the East... So these hymns sung... by the wives and daughters of the Vallabhacharyans to their Maharajas express the most unbridled desire, the most impatient longing for the enjoyments of adulterine love” (MLC 441)

Attempts to sanitize women’s singing practices was a strategy deployed by most reform movements of the nineteenth century in both the Bombay and Bengal presidencies. Sumanta Banerjee, in his work on women’s popular culture in Bengal (1989a; 1989b) discusses how women folk-performers were gradually being marginalized in late nineteenth-century Calcutta as a result of reformist campaigns and a growing *bhadralok* elitism.¹³³ With regards to Kṛṣṇa-themed songs specifically, Banerjee focuses on itinerant female performers (known as *boshtami* or *neri*) who went from house to house in villages and in Calcutta singing *kīrtans*. These same women, many of whom came from low-caste and low class families, also sang *kīrtans* and narrated Vaiṣṇav stories or *kathās* before household women in the *antarmahal* (“inner-home”) or *zenānā* of *bhadralok* homes (1989b, 150-151). Much like the Bombay presidency reformers, *bhadralok* Bengali men also found the erotic *gopī-bhāv* themes of Vaiṣṇav songs as having the potential for morally corrupting family women. As one *bhadralok* writer exclaimed, “It is not possible for an uneducated young woman to remain unexcited when

¹³³ The Bengali term “*bhadralok*” translates as “respectable people,” and as Judith Walsh explains it generally describes “families with a tradition of family literacy, wealthy enough to do no manual labour and possibly able to employ a servant” (2005, 7fn.9).

listening to episodes like Raas [Krishna's dance with the milkmaids]" (151). He suggests that if women were prevented from listening to such *kathās* and instead had the opportunity to "listen to good instructions, discussions on good books and to train themselves in artistic occupations, their religious sense will improve and their souls will become pure and they will be suitable for domestic work" (151-152).

Charu Gupta (2002) explores similar attempts at denouncing women's participation in wedding ceremonies and Holī celebrations in Uttar Pradesh (UP) during the colonial period. Respectable women from upper-caste and middle-class families were urged to abandon the singing of obscene songs such as *gālīs* in public during weddings. The Khatri Hitkar Sabha of Agra even published a pamphlet advising "civilized" women to stop singing simple and "ordinary" songs altogether (93). Holī festivals equally drew the criticism of missionary writers, Hindi newspapers, and Hindu reformers. Once again, the singing of vulgar songs, the free mixing of men and women, and "public displays of unseemly behavior" during Holī celebrations disturbed the new moral sensibilities of upper-caste male reformers. Much like claims made to specific song genres, participation in a festival like Holī became a way for reformers to mark the cultured, "civilized" population from the uncultured, and uncivilized (read here as low caste and poor) (98-99).

Back in the Bombay Presidency, both Karsondas Mulji and Behramji Malabari describe how Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs took advantage of the Holī festival to further engage in debauchorous activities (Mulji 1865, 107). Malabari offers the following description of Holī in *havelī* contexts:

You can in Bombay see Holi in full swing in two places, the Maharaja's Mandir and the Marwari Bazar. In the former could be witnessed, for days together, a promiscuous assemblage of worshippers, without distinction of age, sex, or social position, revelling in orgies such as the western reader could hardly realise. Modest young women are submitted to showers of coloured water and clouds of red paint. They are handled to a degree of indecent familiarity incredible to the outside public. At one exhibition like this hundreds of young women are liable to go astray from the inborn modesty of their nature. It is a wonder how, with such social customs as these, the Vaishnavas lead such happy, contented, and respectable lives. (1884, 381)

Finally, reformist critiques of women's mourning practices indicate another mode by which women's participation in public ceremonies came under surveillance and scrutiny in the nineteenth century. In western India, Karsondas Mulji's greatest supporter, Narmadashankar Lalshankar wrote one of the most extensive critiques of women's public mourning practices in the form of a prize-winning piece entitled "The Madness of Crying and Beating Breasts" in 1857 (Mukta 1999, 29). Both Narmadashankar and another important social reformer of Ahmedabad, Hargovinddas Kantavada, disapproved of the money spent on funeral arrangements and, especially, the boisterous and disorderly behaviour of family women during funeral ceremonies (30). What also disturbed reformers such as Narmadashankar and Kantavada was how lament practices provided a public arena for many women to lobby insults at family members and to voice their own personal grievances. As Parita Mukta explains, "The women lamenters did not simply target the women in the family but male members, caste members or the state, any individual or corporate body held responsible for the death" (35).¹³⁴ Much like their

¹³⁴ Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in his *Milestones in Gujarati Literature* (1914), comments on the dirges, which he calls *rājio* that are sung by women in Gujarat and Kathiawad during funerals. As he explains, "Women, very shrewdly take this opportunity, under the garb of supplying materials for lament, of trotting out their own grievances. For instance, the mother or sister of the widow of the deceased – supposing he

concerns about respectable family women singing Kṛṣṇa-themed songs and participating in Holī festivals, male reformers were concerned about regulating and civilizing women’s mourning behaviour in public settings. The loud and unruly nature of lament practices proved embarrassing for upper-caste reformers such as Mulji and Narmada: “... The Parsee says [on witnessing this] ‘how jungle these women are?’ and the English people say ‘what stupid gypsies are they’... A household’s prestige is dependent on the woman. The people of Europe take pride in their women” (Narmadashankar 1912[1867] 87, qtd in Mukta 37).¹³⁵ For reformers like Narmadashankar, such public behavior by household women threatened family honor because it did not conform to middle-class, patriarchal expectations of how women should conduct themselves (in public). It was, therefore, recommended that women replace customary lament behavior, which included hurling insults, beating one’s chest, and wailing with more sober, religiously-informed practices such as singing and reading religious songs and literature during funerals. Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in his descriptions of Gujarati poets and writers, explains how Bāpu Saheb Gāikwār (1779-1843) from Baroda, who upon witnessing the dirges (*rājīā*) sung by female mourners was “struck by the emptiness of the subject-matter of the song, and also with the ignorance of the reciters” (1914, 180). He composed a new dirge called Rām Rājio, which enumerated the “six great enemies of humanity” such as passion, anger, pride, envy, and so on. According to Jhaveri, in many regions this more religious

has left one – would enumerate all the inconveniences she had been put to during his lifetime by his mother or sister” (179).

¹³⁵ Elsewhere, Narmadashankar compares female mourners with professional female performers – who were labeled as prostitutes by both colonial officials and Indian reformers throughout the nineteenth century: “A prostitute dances, sings but that too on some special occasion within the house, and with decorum and respect; but our women should be seen to be more shameless than the prostitute” ([1857] 1912, 78-79 qtd in Mukta 1999, 38).

dirge soon began replacing the lament songs of female mourners. Ultimately, as Mukta argues, the regulation and taming of public mourning by women was driven by a desire to interiorize and make private the experience of grief within the boundaries of the home. Similarly, as we have seen, attempts were also made to relocate Puṣṭimārg women's religious practices to the home by discouraging lay women from visiting their *gurus* at the *havelī*, cease performing lewd songs in public and in front of the Gosvāmī, and prohibiting their participation in Holī celebrations at the *havelīs*.

The literary outputs of Gujarati poets like Dalpatram Dhayabhai (1820-1898) – the assistant and interpreter for Alexander Forbes (1821-1865) – can help reveal some of the direct implications of nineteenth century reform campaigns which focused on popular literary genres. Forbes, who served as a sessions judge in Surat and Ahmedabad, was instrumental in establishing the Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS) in 1848 in Ahmedabad, an association he hoped would help promote education as well as an interest in the Gujarati language and its literature. Through his relationship with Forbes, Dalpatram became involved with the GVS, and in 1855 he became its secretary and the editor of the society's journal, the *Buddhiprakash* ("Illuminating Intelligence"). Leading reformers and intellectuals of Gujarat, including Mahipatram Rupram, Bholanath Sarabhai, and Narmadshankar Lalshankar contributed to the *Buddhiprakash*, which circulated articles on economics, education, science, and social reform.¹³⁶ However, it was through the poems and essays written by Dalpatram over the next twenty-five years that the *Buddhiprakash* acquired its position as one of the most important journals among the intellectual and mercantile elite of Gujarat. According to Svati Joshi, it is through the

¹³⁶ It was in the *Buddhiprakash* that Narmadshankar Lalshankar published his essay on women's mourning practices, for which he received the prize of 135 rupees in 1857 (Mukta 1999, 29).

essays and poems he wrote for the journal that Dalpatram “developed precise definitions of ‘reform,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘education,’ and ‘literature’ as these terms acquired a specific meaning for the dominant mercantile elite of the city” (2004, 332). He also wrote “special” *garbās* for the *Stribodh*, a journal which was created for and catered to an upper and middle-class female audience (Shukla 1991, 64). It is doubtful Dalpatram wrote *garbās* or poems about the adulterine love between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* for reformist publications like the *Buddhiprakash* and the *Stribodh*.¹³⁷ Dalpatram condemned the singing of “obscene” songs during weddings and festivals which, like most reformers of his time, he interpreted as symptomatic of a lack of education among women. Dalpatram was a supporter of women’s education, an education that would serve to enhance “proper” feminine virtues so that young girls could one day become good, householding women: “The daughter who has studied at school will have good manners of behaving and talking; and she won’t stop in a crowd of wicked women who sing obscene songs... [She] won’t quarrel in the family” (Dalpatram Dhayabhai, *Buddhiprakash* March 1857 qtd in Joshi, 337).

Journals like the *Stribodh* and *Buddhiprakash*, which were only accessible to an elite, educated few, presented an alternative – or at least a new – subject-matter for poems and songs like *garbās*. Puṣṭimārgī *garbās*, which were the target of reform campaigns, were reconstituted as a genre suited for illiterate, low-class or “uncultured” women. This may partly explain why, as we discuss in the follow chapter, elite Puṣṭimārg women today have begun taking lessons in *havelī kīrtan*. By making claims to a more

¹³⁷ Vasudha Dalmia, in her discussion on Hariscandra’s contribution to the first women’s journal in Hindi, the *Balabodhini* (f.1874), notes how Brajbhāṣā verses were censured in the journal since they were considered “too erotic” for a female audience (1997, 247).

“classical” Puṣṭimārg genre, rather than the popular genres of *dhols* and *garbās*, upper-class women are constricting boundaries between themselves and those Puṣṭimārgī women who do conform to such bourgeois aesthetic tastes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a social history of female religiosity in Puṣṭimārg through an examination of women in the *vārtās* and women’s engagement with Puṣṭimārg performance genres. The *vārtās* reveal what is most valued by the tradition and its practitioners, namely the grace of Srīnāthjī and their gurus. The texts are also still *used* by Puṣṭimārgīs; they are heard in congregational settings, sung in the form of *dhols*, and read at home or in groups during *satsaṅg*. Unlike women’s *dhol-pads* and *garbās*, moreover, the *vārtās* have acquired canonical status within the tradition. This is because they narrate the transformative experience of being initiated by Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha, they have been composed by male Gosvāmīs, and are written in Brajbhāṣā.

The *vārtā* literature also indexes a quasi-historical image of Puṣṭimārgī women’s day-to-day ritual activities. What comes across from many *vārtā* narratives is that women were – as they continue to remain today – vital practitioners in the maintenance of domestic *sevā*. The tales also reveal that *sevā* takes time, needs space in the home, and its proper performance requires one to have enough financial means to adequately prepare offerings. In the following chapter, we explore these aspects of women’s ritual lives by returning to our debate on class, domesticity, and the production of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity. I demonstrate how socio-religious reform movements,

nationalist discourses, and twentieth-century consumer practices have reconstituted the home as the modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

From our discussion of Puṣṭimārg performance genres, we learned that *bahūjīs* and *beṭijīs* as well as female lay practitioners wrote and sang devotional songs. The compositions serve as an historical lens for focusing on the ways women have contributed to Puṣṭimārg’s oral traditions. The performance of such songs, many of which have the erotic love between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* as their prominent theme, also became the subject of vitriolic critique by reformers across western India, UP, and Bengal. However, this does not mean that women stopped singing. In contemporary Gujarat, women continue to sing *dhols* and *garbās* in *satsaṅg* gatherings, while at home performing *sevā*, and in public settings at *havelīs* during festivals and also while waiting for the doors to open before *darśan*. For this reason I agree with Parita Mukta, who argues that the success of a reform campaign should not be measured “by the efficacy and efficiency with which it was immediately able to obliterate the cultural practices it contested” (1999, 33). Instead, we should turn our attention to how upper-caste, middle-class ideologies of the reform era “...provided emerging notions of bourgeois comportment which has had a lasting impact on the self-image of this class” (ibid). These ideologies were in turn mapped onto the bodies and practices of household women, upon whom family *ābrū* and respectability hinged. As we discuss in the following chapter, such lasting implications of “bourgeois comportment” can be demonstrated today by the increased commodified styles of domestic *sevā* performed by women, as well as by upper-class Puṣṭimārg women’s growing interest in taking *kīrtan* lessons in *havelī saṅgīt* or Puṣṭimārg temple music. There is a desire among elite family women – whom can

spare the time, have the monetary means to pay for such lessons, and who are clearly literate – to learn how to sing the *kīrtans* of *havelī* liturgy in their “proper” classical style.

CHAPTER 5

From *Havelī* to Home:

Women's Domestic Religious Practices and the Production of Prestige in Contemporary Puṣṭimārg

From the tradition's beginnings, the home as well as the *havelī* have been important sites of worship for Puṣṭimārgīs. Chapters one and two provided several historical indications of the practice of domestic *sevā*, at least from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Our discussion of the *vārtās* in chapter four also illustrates the importance of domestic *sevā* in Puṣṭimārg. Furthermore, starting with Vallabha himself, the sect's disavowal of asceticism and the foregrounding of the *grhastha* ("householder") *āśrama* or tradition demonstrates how the home and family are important aspects of Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and community formation. Finally, Puṣṭimārg ritual praxis is imbued with domestic and familial imagery and emotions (*bhāv*): The *havelī* is understood as Nandālaya ("the home of Nanda," Kṛṣṇa's foster-father) and Śrīnāthjī is devotionally approached and treated as a young child in need of parental care (*vātsalya bhāv*). Puṣṭimārgī sectarian identities permeate quotidian domestic activities such as waking, bathing, cooking, and eating, and the home is a place where foods, and material objects, consumed are first dedicated to Śrīnāthjī, who is regarded as a member of the family.

In contemporary Gujarat, the Puṣṭimārg home continues to be an integral site for performing *sevā*, hosting *satsaṅgs* with fellow practitioners, singing *dhols* and *garbās*, inviting Gosvāmīs for religious talks (*bhāgavata kathā*), and for celebrating religious festivals. The home, however, is also the primary site in which other cultural

processes take place. One of the major concerns of the present chapter is to tie together our discussions from chapters three and four – on nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements and domestic reform – with twentieth century nationalist ideologies, consumption practices, and class politics. I suggest that these on-going processes reconstitute the Puṣṭimārg home as a cultural site for both class and sectarian identity formation and production. Changing notions of domesticity and ideal womanhood, moreover, reimagine upper-class household women (wives, daughter-in-laws, mothers) as the primary practitioners, pedagogues, and producers of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity.

On January 2, 2008 I was invited by Rukmini Shukla, a Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav woman, to attend an event that her friend Bhavna Patel was hosting in her home in one of the more upscale neighborhoods of Ahmedabad, Gujarat.¹³⁸ After we pulled up in Rukmini’s Mercedes-Benz, we entered one of Bhavna’s three living rooms, where twelve women had already gathered for the occasion. As was evident from their expensive silk *sārīs* and accessories, as well as their luxury cars with drivers attentively stationed outside, all of the women came from wealthy, upper class families. It soon became apparent that some women in the group were friends, while others were related through marriage. Rukmini began the session by handing out a small booklet on *sevā*, which the women discussed for a short while. They then moved onto deliberations about different *srñgār* (“adornment”) designs for their household *svarūps* (“image”), and ended with a tentative plan for their upcoming pilgrimage tour to Mathura. While snacks and refreshments were being served by Bhavna’s three housemaids, I asked how often this

¹³⁸ All of my conversations with women in the Puṣṭimārg community occurred in Hindi or Gujarati, and the translations are my own. All the names of the women I worked with that appear in this chapter are pseudonyms, with the exception of Dini Shodhan.

afternoon gathering occurred and what, exactly, it was. “Once a month,” Rukmini answered, “it’s a Vaiṣṇav kitty party.”¹³⁹

Events like Bhavna’s “Vaiṣṇav kitty party” are regular occurrences among Ahmedabad’s elite Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav women. They index the ways in which women’s participation in the sect involves the reification of class privilege and status production. A major preoccupation of Puṣṭimārgī women today is the performance of domestic *sevā*. In this chapter I focus on the contemporary devotional practices of upper-class women in the urban domestic context, primarily in the city of Ahmedabad. I examine how women’s practice of domestic *sevā* becomes a site of familial negotiation and mediation among females in the Puṣṭimārg household. At the same time, the social networks and social spaces created as a result of their practice of, and interest in, domestic *sevā* not only reinforce their identities as Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs but also serve to reify their class privilege. In the modern Puṣṭimārg urban home, class and status come to be signified by the characteristic markers of privilege, such as large bungalows, the presence of domestic labor, and signs of available disposable income. However, family status is also demonstrated by the material expressions of their devotional practices, such as increased commodified styles of domestic worship, the consumption and display of expensive religious commodities, the time and space allotted to the practice of domestic *sevā*, and the ability and preference to pay for *havelī kīrtan* lessons.

¹³⁹ A “kitty party” is a kind of tea party or social gathering hosted by urban elite Indian women. Waldrop (2011) draws on the work of Sethi (1995) and notes how, perhaps, the contemporary urban kitty-party phenomenon may have developed from a type of rotating saving association common among women in rural areas of South Asia. The contemporary, urban kitty-party differs from these associations in two significant ways: “First, rather than emphasizing the saving aspect, the kitty-party emphasizes socializing and entertainment, and second, rather than being popular among low-income groups, the kitty-party is patronized by the middle and upper classes” (Sethi qtd. in Waldrop 2011, 164).

Domesticity, Women, and the Nation

In chapter three we discussed how the Mahārāj Libel Case in 1862 represented the culmination of reformist critiques, which targeted the wealthy Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities and their religious leaders, the Gosvāmīs. The most prominent allegation put forth by reformers, like Karsondas Mulji, against Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs was regarding their sexual promiscuity and sexual exploitation of female devotees. The Libel Case was indeed informed by Orientalist and Hindu revivalist preoccupations with constructing “authentic” Hinduism along Sanskritic, upper-caste, and patriarchal lines. However, the Libel Case was also implicated in and indexed larger, over-arching nineteenth century discourses on women’s social, sexual, and religious behavior. More generally, these included debates on widow remarriage, age of consent, and female education. In terms of women’s religious and social practices, reforms focused on women’s “superstitious” beliefs, their behavior during mourning ceremonies, and the singing of “obscene songs” by women during weddings. Finally, Puṣṭimārg women were criticized for their relationship with Gosvāmīs, their movements to and from *havelīs*, and the singing of erotic-themed *garbās* and *dhols* in festivals like Holī and in front of Gosvāmīs. Middle-class women’s bodies and activities needed to be regulated because of the metonymic ties being forged between home, women, and family status (*ābrū*) and respectability. Karsondas Mulji expresses this view, while tying them to nationalist concerns, in his anxious appeal to the men from the Puṣṭimārg *baniyā* community: “If you do not respect your own home, then how is it possible for you to increase your honour in the world? Woman constitutes your home and therefore, you ought to treat her

with respect. Without such honour, our country's status will never be high" (Motiwala, 237).

The proliferation of domestic manuals in the nineteenth century, the introduction of Domestic Science in educational institutions, and the rise in women's journals (like the *Stribodh*) illustrate the increased importance placed on husband-wife relationships, child-rearing, and managing domestic chores and affairs "hygienically" and efficiently. More importantly, such discourses centered on the wife's central role in the production of proper domesticity (Walsh 2004, 8). Texts like *Essay on the Promotion of Domestic Reform* (1881), written by Elphinstone graduate Ganpat Lakshman, indicate common concerns middle-class male reformers had regarding women's activities in the home. In one section, Ganpat Lakshman contrasts the condition and activities of young women who come from upper class homes with those from lower class households in Bombay.¹⁴⁰ He criticizes young ladies from upper-class families – who lack proper education – for spending their days "engaged in unnecessary ceremonies, in useless rivalries... in idle talking", and in discussing the marriages of their friends and the ornaments and articles of furniture exchanged during these events (83). On a positive note, Lakshman notes that if they can read a few girls from these families might be seen reading some religious books (84). However, Ganpat Lakshman suggests that the "most honorable" activity for women from upper class families is needle-work. He even quotes from what appears to be Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* (1751): "whenever chance brings within my observation a knot of young ladies busy at their needles, I consider myself as in the school of virtue...because I regard them as providing a security against the most

¹⁴⁰ It is important to note that reformers during this time period, including Ganpat Lakshman, used the English terms "upper-class," "middle-class," and "lower-class."

dangerous snares of the soul by enabling themselves to exclude idleness from their solitary moments” (82).

In describing the condition of young women from lower-class families, Ganpat Lakshman notes how they do not have fine cloths to sew, do not participate in ceremonies “for they have no money to discharge the expenses attending them,” and do not practice singing, “for they are so removed from the polish and refinement of the higher classes, as never to have been able to acquire a taste for that art” (90). He is also critical of women from the lower classes who have to find employment outside their home because of the lack of attention their children will receive (75-76). The lower-class female labourer, who appears to spend no time at home with her children, disturbs the patriarchal nuclear family model being promoted by domestic and social reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The wife-mother is expected to be both the “governess of the home” and the moral educator of children, roles which she cannot possibly fulfill if she spends her time outside of the house. Decades later, in the early twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi echoes similar views on women in the home, using, once again, the example of the lower-class female labourer:

“...women also must be gradually weaned from mill labour. If man and woman are partners in life and complementary each of the other, they become good householders only by dividing their labour, and a wise mother finds her time fully occupied in looking after her household and children. But where both husband and wife have to labour for mere maintenance, the nation must become degraded. It is like a bankrupt living on his capital”. (*Advice to Satyagrahis in an Industrial Strike*,” in the Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 116)

The rise of cultural nationalism towards the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the influence of Gandhian nationalism in the early decades of the twentieth

century, saw discourses surrounding women and domesticity put into the service of national regeneration. As Mary Hancock points out, the nationalist period saw a sharpening of the social meanings of and distinctions between “private” and “public” spaces and forms of action. “In elite nationalisms,” Hancock attests, “the privatization of domesticity accompanied efforts to frame homes both as (feminine) ‘backstages’ of new (masculine) public realms, and as sites for producing new nationalized and classed subjects” (2001, 876). Furthermore, if during the period of reform women’s roles as companionate wives were emphasized, nationalism heralded childrearing and motherhood as the moral and civic duty of all women.¹⁴¹

With regards to Gandhian nationalism, more generally, Madhu Kishwar (1985) acknowledges that the movement succeeded in mobilizing a large number of women to participate in anti-colonial campaigns. In some respects Gandhi’s views on women mark an important shift from earlier nineteenth century reform constructions of womanhood. The most crucial difference, Kishwar argues, is that Gandhi “does not see women as objects of reform, as helpless creatures deserving charitable concern. Instead, he sees them as active, self-conscious agents of social change” (1757). However, as Sujata Patel (1988) points out, such a simplistic and rather romantic reading of “women’s

¹⁴¹ Ideologies and practices that tied women’s domesticity to national welfare and racial purity were not confined to the colony alone. As Ann Stoler explains, childrearing was hailed as a “national, imperial, and racial duty” in late-nineteenth century Britain, France, Holland, the United States, and Germany (1991, 82). Nationalist discourses across the modern world were also couched in domestic and familial imagery, where the country is imagined as a homeland, its language(s) recast as mother-tongue(s), its citizens constituting a brotherhood and fraternity, and the nation itself is “incarnated as parent – sometimes a father figure but most often than not mother” (Ramaswamy 2010, 74). In India, the image of motherhood as well as the positioning of women as “mothers of the nation” found its culmination or apotheosis in the figure of the goddess, Bhārat Mātā (“Mother India”). As Sumathi Ramaswamy argues, “Like her human surrogate, Bharat Mata is a ‘new woman’... She is the inviolable essence of the nation in the making, and as such she is imagined as the cherished and venerable mother who presides over her home that is deemed the last bastion of autonomy and authenticity in a world that has been made over by the work of empire and colonialism” (74-75).

involvement” in Gandhian politics obfuscates any differences in class, caste, and religion which informed Gandhi’s articulation of ideal womanhood and which characterized the kind of women who did participate in the nationalist movement. Indeed, Gandhi viewed practices like child marriage, *sati*, and dowry as oppressive and cruel to women.¹⁴² He also supported women’s right to vote and encouraged women’s “political” roles. These roles, however, were embedded and shaped by specific urban middle-class and upper-caste understandings of women’s inherent virtues and values, ideas that resonate with social reform movements of the past. For example, in addition to spinning *khādi* (“raw cotton”) during the civil disobedience movement or rallying against the purchase of foreign goods, one of the most important “political” roles a woman could have was as a mother: she instilled national consciousness in her children, she spun *khādi* at home, and was responsible for clothing her family in Indian-made fabric (378, 380). Furthermore, if a woman were able to reject her sexuality and family life, and instead channeled her energies towards national welfare, she could “achieve a higher moral and spiritual role” (378). A woman’s inherent feminine virtues – those of patience, courage, purity, and the ability to endure suffering – were projected as superior to masculine ones in Gandhian national rhetoric.

In many ways, earlier nineteenth century debates surrounding domesticity and women’s sexual and social practices dovetailed with such nationalist articulations of ideal womanhood. Women’s roles as companionate wives, as producers of domestic order, and

¹⁴² Although Gandhi does criticize the practice of *sati* he nevertheless places the state of widowhood on a spiritual pedestal, which does not help ameliorate the social, emotional, and economic conditions of widowhood *per se*. According to Gandhi, widowhood presented an opportunity for women to practice spiritual cultivation and to live a life of austerity. For example, in 1924, Gandhi claimed “the Hindu widow’s self control has been carried by Hinduism to its greatest heights...A widow does not even look at suffering as suffering. Renunciation has become a second nature to them, and to renounce it would be painful to them. They find happiness in their self denial” (CWMG, Vol 22, 1924, p 523 qtd in Patel 385).

especially their motherly responsibility as moral educators of (male) children/citizens, were viewed as the backbone of national order and progress. The growing concern with producing a domestic environment where the nation's future citizens could cultivate their cultural and national identities precluded domestic and gender reform movements from progressing along wholly western lines. This process hinged on middle-class women's abilities to negotiate modernity. On the one hand, they had to be cautious of not becoming "too western" or "too educated" (that is, "too reformed"). On the other hand, they had to distance themselves from the behavior of "uncultured" women, those who followed superstitious beliefs, wailed and beat their chests in mourning rituals, or in the Puṣṭimārg context, those who continued to regard Gosvāmīs as divine figures, sang lewd *gopī-bhāv* songs, or "mixed promiscuously" with men at *havelīs*. At the same time, moreover, it was important, indeed essential, that Puṣṭimārg women continued to uphold their religious practices, especially in the home. It was a critical mechanism by which the modernizing middle-classes could assert their cultural superiority over the West (Chatterjee 1990; 1993). However, women's ritual practices needed to be regulated so that their actions helped reify rather than undermine emerging notions of family status and female respectability.

By the twentieth century, the ideal urban, middle-class Hindu woman was cast as a repository of inherent spiritual and moral virtues, understood through the upper-caste, patriarchal *sāstric* language of *strī-dharma* ("women's duty") and the idealized figure of the *pativrata* ("devoted wife").¹⁴³ The degree to which women could engage in

¹⁴³ As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, "Converting women into *grihalakshmis* (Lakshmi of the household) through the novel means of formal education was the self-appointed task of a civilising nationalism" (1993, 9).

religious practices – without allowing them to disrupt their roles as mothers and wives – helped produce and maintain family status or *ābrū*. This process was symptomatic of the larger project of modernity namely, the gendering of home as an inherently spiritual, feminine space and the outside world as inherently rational and masculine (Chatterjee 1989; 1993). The home was imagined as a site of cultural production that hinged on constructing women as practitioners and producers of status, comfort, and respectability, and, more importantly, women were cast as the custodians and embodiments of an “authentic” Hindu identity.

Such reformist negotiations with nationalist modernity and the implications of women’s domestic practices in this process can be illustrated in the pages of later domestic manuals, like Hargovindas Dvarkadas Kantavala’s Gujarati publication, *Grh Vidyā athvā Ghar Vyavasthā* (“Home Science” or “Home Management,” 1927).¹⁴⁴ Here, advice to women is indeed disseminated along more “Indian lines.” Kantavala felt the types of clothing, like scarfs, socks, and gloves that young girls were learning to knit in schools seemed more beneficial for a European society. Instead, he wanted young Indian girls to learn Indian styles of embroidery (1-2). He criticized Gujarati women, most likely from upper-class families, who did not know how to cook because they had domestic help in the kitchen. For this reason, Kantavala attempted to initiate cooking classes in places like Baroda; he insisted that *pāk-sāstra* (“Science of Cooking”) was just as relevant to learn in girls’ schools as the geography of Africa or the river-system of Brazil (6). After providing information on hygienic practices (18-27), Kantavala advises women to become more economically aware and to begin keeping accounts of the materials and

¹⁴⁴ I am indebted to Abigail McGowan for sharing her vast collection of Gujarati domestic manuals with me, many of which were published around the turn of the twentieth century.

food-items being purchased for the home (35-36). In his advice for married couples, moreover, Kantavala explains how a woman who does not consider her husband to be her *svāmi* (“lord”), and instead demeans him (“*thuchkare*”), cannot expect to be loved by her husband (131). And although he acknowledges that only the highest caliber woman (a *sādhvī*) can follow all the prescriptions of *strī-dharma*, Kantavala urges that every woman should uphold her *dharma* as best as possible in the modern age (132). Finally, in addition to sending children to school, Kantavala called upon parents to impart a moral (“*nīti*”) or *dhārmic* education to their children. If they cannot, they should at the very least urge their children to engage in practices that can help instill moral virtues, such as performing worship after bathing, reciting devotional songs (“*bhajan, kīrtan*”) and listening to *dharmic* and moral teachings in the form of *kathās* and *vārtās* (135-136). Kantavala’s advice envisions parents, and especially mothers, as pedagogues of morality and of *dharmic* or religious teachings and practices, and the home is effectively reimagined as the primary site of cultural production.

Gender, Consumption, and the Production of Class

From our discussion thus far, we can identify some key factors involved in the articulation and production of urban middle-class identities by the early decades of the twentieth century Bombay Presidency. Members of the middle-classes were intimately involved in the projects of modernity, such as acquiring a Western education, entering government service, and engaging with print culture. Using these tools, many propelled themselves into the political sphere by challenging both the aristocratic and mercantile elite and colonial leadership. The rise in urban professional jobs, such as in law and

medicine, allowed many members of the middle-classes to bridge the gap between themselves and the wealthy elite. Economic status, as determined by one's occupation and income, was – and still is – an important aspect of class identity.¹⁴⁵ However, the middle-classes were also the primary mobilizers of social and religious reform, which reconstituted women and domesticity as moral indicators of family status and respectability. Sanjay Joshi, in his study on the middle-classes of colonial Lucknow (2001), attributes all of these factors, and not just economic progress, to the ascendancy of the middle-class in postcolonial India: "...[it] was a product of a relatively long historical process, and was predicated on the creation of new forms of politics, the restructuring of norms of social conduct, and the construction of new values guiding domestic as well as public life" (1).

The middle-classes were never a homogenous social group. Even today, in a post-liberalization economic context, India's middle-classes are far from being constitutive of a clearly demarcated economic or social category. As Henrike Donner and Geert De Neve point out, in contemporary India, a growing number of individuals self-identify as "middle-class."¹⁴⁶ This poses difficulties for researchers who want to define middle-class status because "even the most cursory glance" at the communities and individuals who self-ascribe as being middle class differ widely, "not only in terms of economic position and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values"

¹⁴⁵ Traditional, Weberian approaches to class highlight economic factors such as education, occupation and social networks, and a community's relationship with the market (Donner and De Neve, 6).

¹⁴⁶ "Middle-class" has become a ubiquitous term in today's India, and it is used by the government, the media, and by citizens to describe a large and inconsistent portion of India's population. According to recent studies conducted by the Indian National Council of Applied Economic Research (INCAER), which identifies the middle-class as those earning between \$4,000 and \$21,000 per year, the Indian middle class constitute 60 million people. While other studies, such as those conducted by CNN-IBN and the Hindustan Times in which middle-class status is based on the ownership of at least one commodity (telephone, washing machine, color television), the figure is estimated as high as 200 million (Ram-Prasad, 2007).

(2011, 3). From its very emergence then, to be middle-class was a project of self-fashioning, constantly in the making, rather than a “flat sociological fact” (Joshi, 2001 2).

In addition to the old, colonial qualifiers of class status – one’s education, occupation, and family background – an important factor in the “self-fashioning” of status, especially in India’s post-liberalization era (1980s-90s and on), is the consumption and acquisition of commodities. Global capitalist economies, new modes of consumption, as well as decreased anxieties over the conspicuous display of wealth, has created a “new consumerist” middle-class in contemporary India (Donner and De Neve, 5). Women’s growing roles as consumers and their ability to dictate what can be purchased for the home has allowed for new and creative material expressions of status, aesthetic tastes, and religious sensibilities in the urban Puṣṭimārg household.

To this end, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has greatly enriched our understandings of class production and display. In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu explains how both cultural and social forms of capital are implicated in the production of status in a given group or community. Cultural capital involves those cultural skills and practices, such as “table manners or the art of conversation, musical culture or the sense of propriety” (70), which “symbolize possession of the material and cultural means of maintaining a bourgeois life-style” (122). Social capital refers to “a capital of social connections, honourability and respectability that is often essential in winning and keeping the confidence of high society” (122). Building on Bourdieu’s theories, I suggest that the maintenance and production of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity are cultural practices which establish and promote both family respectability and a network of social

connections among the Puṣṭimārg mercantile elite of Gujarat.¹⁴⁷ My discussion of Puṣṭimārg laywomen’s *sevā* rituals also draw heavily from Mary Hancock’s brilliant study on south Indian *smārta* women’s religious practices. Hancock argues that the everyday actions in which women’s rituals are embedded – such as washing, cooking, and eating – reproduce caste, gender, and class identities (1999, 21). These domestic rituals, like other cultural practices, have been “transformed by contestatory nationalisms, transnational processes, commodification, and class formation” (25). Drawing upon both Hancock and Bourdieu I demonstrate that, in the Puṣṭimārg context, women’s ritual activities can be understood as sites of cultural consumption and display, where the practice of domestic *sevā* not only reinforces their identities as Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs but also serve to reify their class privilege. Increased commodified styles of domestic *sevā*, the display of expensive religious commodities, as well as the growing desire among elite women to learn how to sing *havelī kīrtans* are all practices that help reproduce class differences and social hierarchies between members of the Puṣṭimārg community.

In his study on consumption practices and domestic economies in late colonial Bombay, Prashant Kidambi notes how, after the first world war, the rise in available goods, services, and mass entertainments offered urban consumers a plethora of choices.¹⁴⁸ As Kidambi argues, “those who claimed to belong to the middle class were

¹⁴⁷ Josephine Reynell (1987), in her study on laywomen’s religious practices amongst the Śvetāmbar Jain community in Jaipur, also draws similar conclusions vis-à-vis religious identities and class status. Reynell demonstrates how men’s public donative practices as well as women’s domestic ritual practices, which include the maintenance of daily worship and the performance of weekly, monthly and/or annual fasts, are modes by which family prestige is demonstrated. Since many of the Jain families she worked with are members of the wealthy elite, Reynell argues that “The maintenance of this prestige is an important economic strategy with implications for the future standing of each family within the community” (318).

¹⁴⁸ An 1893 article published in the Gujarati reformist journal, the *Buddhiprakash*, lists a number of foreign goods that can be found in the homes of Gujarati families: French satin *sarīs*, pocket-watches, spoons, matchsticks, china tea cups and saucers, children’s toys, et cetera (McGowan 2006, 35; 2010, 157).

conscious of the fact that consumption had become an essential measure of status in a modernizing urban context where the traditional markers of the caste hierarchy were no longer adequate guarantors of social standing” (2010, 118). However, economic uncertainty through the 1920s and 1930s combined with a growing Gandhian nationalist rhetoric which discouraged conspicuous consumption practices, placed middle-class families in a position of consistently having to “weigh up their quotidian spending choices” (118). Although the years leading up to the second world war can hardly be characterized by a “culture of mass consumption” and “consumerism,” the turn of the century nevertheless marked an important shift in women’s roles as consumers. Urban, elite housewives were not only using new goods, but as Abigail McGowan points out, “they were claiming authority over goods in new ways” (2006, 35). Changing domestic ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century challenged traditional models of the domestic economy in which elders of the home managed finances and purchases for the joint family and only senior women monitored and controlled expenditures on foodstuffs and servants (35). Publications catered to urban elite housewives, like Pandita Ramabai’s *Stri Dharma Niti* (“Morals for Women”), vernacular translations of Flora Annie Steel’s *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, journals like *Stribodh*, and domestic manuals in general, emphasized and indexed the important roles of women as managers of domestic order, comfort - - and now, consumption (36-37).

This is to not say that housewives, all of a sudden, became consuming agents in charge of the family’s financial resources. Other than the valuables and money women would bring with them at the time of marriage, upper-class women in late colonial India

most likely did not work outside of the home; they have been, and many continue to remain, wholly dependent on their husbands and the men of the family for access to money. For the most part, moreover, women from elite families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not travel to bazaars to purchase goods. Instead they sent servants or kinsmen from their families and relied on *their* consumer choices. As Douglas Haynes and Abigail McGowan acknowledge, “Consumption behaviours played a central role in the shaping of power relations. They were essential in the creation and maintenance of patterns of economic dominance, social status, and patriarchy” (2010, 4).

Having said that, economic capital is not the only means by which class and family status is maintained and reproduced. Although the men of a household may make the final decision on important family expenditures, in the Puṣṭimārg context, women’s aesthetic choices and their active engagement in religious activities, from the daily maintenance of domestic *sevā* (which includes the use of various ritual accoutrements and food offerings), going on pilgrimage, organizing *satsang* gatherings, purchasing – or even influencing the decision to purchase – expensive religious commodities to display in the home, allow women to “transmute wealth into moral worth” (Hancock 1999, 86). Just as patterns of religious giving have, historically, allowed wealthy *baniyā* men to “safely” demonstrate and produce family prestige, Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities mitigate anxieties over the frivolous spending habits of urban housewives. Their maintenance and perpetuation of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity, moreover, provides the cultural and social capital needed to reproduce family class status and respectability, and signals the extension of consumer culture to ritual praxis.

Bonds of Grace: Kinship Ties, Social Networks, and the Practice of Domestic *Sevā*

I begin our discussion of contemporary Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā* by demonstrating how the practice was introduced to many women as a result of their marriage into Puṣṭimārgī families. At times, the rite of initiation and the practice of domestic *sevā* becomes a source of tension between kinswomen and husbands and wives. Moreover, marriage, and the various social ties between women that emerge as a result of it, signals an association between the practice of *sevā*, class privilege, and family status production.

The prominent *bhakti-bhāv* (devotional sentiment) evoked in Puṣṭimārg is *vātsalya-bhāv* (“parental-love”), performing the *sevā* of Śrīnāthjī with all the care, attentiveness, and love that a mother has for her child.¹⁴⁹ Most of the women I interviewed in Ahmedabad spend an average of one and a half to two hours a day performing *sevā*, which includes preparing ritual food offerings (*bhog*), adorning the image of Kṛṣṇa (*śṛṅgār*), offering the mid-day meal (*rājbhog*), and finally ending in the evening with placing Kṛṣṇa to sleep until the next morning (*śayan*), when he is awakened

¹⁴⁹ It is perhaps in the *bhakti* context, particularly in the Vaiṣṇav *bhakti* context, that we can truly appreciate the congruence of religious and aesthetic experience. In Vaiṣṇav *bhakti*, emotional sentiments or *bhāv* becomes the primary mode of approaching and experiencing the divine. Medieval Vaiṣṇav theologians and rhetoricians, such as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavs, Rūpa Gosvāmī and Jīva Gosvāmī, substantiated the role of emotion in *bhakti* by invoking and reinterpreting Sanskrit aesthetic theory and reducing the eight (*sthāyi-*) *bhāvs* to five: *dāsyā-bhāv* (servitude); *sākhyā-bhāv* (friendship); *vātsalya-bhāv* (parental love); *madhura-bhāv* (erotic love); and, *sānta-bhāv* (peace and reverence) (Haberman 1988; McDaniel 1989; Wulff 1984). Each *bhāv* (except, perhaps the fifth) is modeled after human relationships and, therefore, each devotional relationship or *bhakti-bhāv* becomes a particular mode by which devotees approach and experience their love for Kṛṣṇa. The earliest reference to this taxonomy of *bhakti-bhāvs* can be found in the tenth century text, the *Nāradabhaktisūtra* (v.82). Nārada also explains how a devotee should completely surrender themselves to Kṛṣṇa, where the dynamic experience of the pain of separation (*vīraha*) and joy in union (*saṁyog*) with Kṛṣṇa becomes the highest emotional state.

for the morning *ārtī* (waving of the camphor flame or *maṅgal ārtī*).¹⁵⁰ Since Puṣṭimārg follows orthodox purity-pollution prescriptions, most women observe menstrual restrictions and delegate the the performance of *sevā* to their family members during times of menses. Furthermore, many, if not all, the women I worked with learned how to perform *sevā* from their own mothers, grand-mothers or grand-fathers, aunts, mother-in-laws, and female friends – and not from printed *sevā* manuals.¹⁵¹ Printed *sevā* guides are kept on hand for festivals and for remembering which *kīrtans* or *dhols* to sing during each *darśan*. Several women also have re-written their grandparents or in-laws’ *sevā* guides or have had them dictated from memory by their elders, thus committing them to writing for the first time. Although many women have begun to attend *sevā śivīrs* or “retreats” and are turning to published *sevā* manuals or *paddhatis* – which leads to a more standardized practice of *sevā* – descriptions of *sevā* practices have thus varied throughout my study.

Bhavna Patel, whom we were introduced to in the opening narrative (see page 216) and Ganga Patel are sister-in-laws (married to two brothers) in an affluent business class family in Ahmedabad.¹⁵² Their mother-in-law (*sās*), Kajol Patel (b.1909), was an ardent Puṣṭimārg devotee who followed strict purity rules in her preparations and

¹⁵⁰ In *havelī* contexts the *sevā* of Śrīnāthjī is structured according to the following liturgical cycle: *Maṅgal* (Kṛṣṇa is awakened); *śṛṅgār* (the *svarūp* is adorned); *gvāl* (Kṛṣṇa is displayed as walking in the pasture with cows, and playing with his friends); *rājabhog* (the most ornate of them, when Kṛṣṇa is presented with his mid-day meal); *utthāpan* (after an afternoon nap, Kṛṣṇa has wandered off in the pastures with his friends and is called to return); *sandhyā* (Kṛṣṇa is offered a light meal); *śayan* (Kṛṣṇa has gone to bed for the night). Although many lay practitioners attempt to follow this routine, for the most part, they conflate *maṅgal* and *śṛṅgār*, and sometimes *rājabhog* as well, or the mid-day is meal offered several hours later. Some perform *utthāpan*, and again conflate *sandhyā* and *śayan* in the evening if they have time. However, many women simply stop after offering *rājabhog* and do not perform the evening *sevā*. The primary reason given for this is that, by the evening, their husbands and children come home from work or school (if the children are young).

¹⁵¹ As Bhavna expressed to me, “*meri sās hi meri guru hāī*,” “my mother-in-law is my teacher.”

¹⁵² With Bhavna and Ganga, the Patel family has now been Puṣṭimārgī for at least three generations. Financially, Bhavna states how her in-laws were not always a very wealthy family, with their construction business only prospering in the last few decades.

performance of *sevā* (*apras sevā*). One of the primary domestic duties of daughter-in-laws (*bahū*) is the preparation of meals, and since all the food cooked in the house was first ritually offered to Kṛṣṇa, Bhavna and Ganga were expected to obtain initiation before marrying into the family. Without being initiated, Bhavna and Ganga would not be able to perform one of their primary household obligations, namely enter the kitchen and cook all meals for the entire family.

The two women were also expected to assist their mother-in-law in her daily performance of *sevā*. Bhavna recalled an incident that occurred in the first few years of marriage when her mother-in-law asked her to place the tray of food-offerings in the *sevā* room before guests arrived.¹⁵³ Sensing her irritability, Bhavna’s mother-in-law felt that the food-offerings had been “tainted” and so she did not offer the food to Śrīnāthjī, and she and her husband fasted for the rest of the day. As Bhavna remembers, “It was very difficult in the beginning. I was not attached at all, there were too many rules, and they all felt so unnecessary.” When I met them many years after this incident, Bhavna and Ganga perform daily *sevā* in their respective homes and both acknowledge how *sevā* has become an integral and even fulfilling part of their lives; without it their day would not feel complete. When I asked Bhavna about *her* daughter-in-law – who happens to come from a Jain family – Bhavna noted with enthusiasm that she has also received Puṣṭimārg *dīkṣā* and occasionally helps her in performing daily *sevā*.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ In addition to the maintenance of ritual purity, most Puṣṭimārgī followers do not allow food-offerings to be touched or seen by non-Puṣṭimārgī individuals in order to protect the food-offerings from the “evil-eye” or *dr̥ṣṭi*.

¹⁵⁴ In my own work, I came across several households in which the wife’s/daughter-in-law’s natal family were Jain, and who were nevertheless expected to obtain *dīkṣā* at the time of marriage. There were also examples of young women from Puṣṭimārg families marrying into Jain families. This does not resonate with Josephine Reynell’s study of Jain women, in which she argues “...marriages with other Jain castes or

Similar experiences of being obliged to obtain *dīkṣā* before marriage are common to many of the women I worked with who married into Puṣṭimārgī families. In addition to being a method for perpetuating Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities, the rite of initiation and the daily practice of *sevā* became one of the many means by which the authority of a groom’s family, especially that of the mother-in-law, is deployed, maintained, and even resisted. Gita Lakhani, who is in her early seventies and is at the social center of a large Puṣṭimārg community in Ahmedabad, comments on how a mother-in-law’s daily *sevā* practice – particularly her strict enforcement of purity rules – can have far lasting and detrimental effects on relationships between kinswomen. When a mother-in-law is too strict, Gita explains, and she keeps saying to her daughter-in-law “don’t come into the kitchen!,” “wash yourself!,” “don’t touch me!,” it is bound to create tensions. “And now, when the *sās* is old,” Lakhani quips, “her *bahū* does not want to take care of her.”

On several occasions the conversation became uncomfortable when I asked some older women if their daughter-in-laws assist them in doing *sevā*. Sudha Shah, who also received initiation at the time of her wedding forty-six years ago, shares her disappointment at the lack of interest her *bahūs* express when performing *sevā*. With time, she says, her daughter-in-laws have stopped participating in and assisting her with daily *sevā* altogether, unless there is a large festival approaching. This is a concern for Sudha as she is not sure whether the practice of *sevā*, which has been maintained by her

with non Jain castes are strictly censured” (1987, 332). Douglas Haynes, on the other hand, does acknowledge how sectarian affiliations at times failed to preserve rigid endogamous and communal boundaries between Brahmin-*banīyā* merchants: “Intermarriage was possible [between Jains and Vaishnavas] in some cases, especially since some *jnatis* [sub-castes] included both Jain and Hindu families” (Govindbhai Desai, *Hindu Families in Gujarat*, qtd in Haynes 1991, 55). It would seem that among the *banīyā* communities, caste and class status at times trumped sectarian or religious differences.

husband's family for at least the last two generations, will continue with her grandchildren. These anxieties signal the important roles and pressures women, as mothers, face to preserve and perpetuate a family's sectarian identity by ensuring that they and their children continue the practice of domestic *sevā*.

There are, however, exceptional cases in which a daughter-in-law who is not a follower of Puṣṭimārg maintains the family's domestic *sevā*. This is the case with Dini Shodhan, the great-grand-daughter-in-law of Puṣṭimārg *śeṭh*, Balabhai Damordas, who founded the well-known Sarangpur Mills in Ahmedabad (see page 81). I visited Dini Shodhan in the family's large estate where there is a small temple built on the grounds next to her home, the "Villa Shodhan," designed by the French architect, Le Corbusier. Dini, who comes from a Jain family, continued to have a Jain shrine in her home after her marriage. She notes how her husband's family, especially her mother-in-law, were staunch (*pakka*) Puṣṭimārgīs; her *sās* would not even come to her home to eat meals. When her in-laws passed away, their *svarūp* became the inheritance of their son, Dini's husband. The *svarūp*, which is close to one hundred years old, was placed in the temple built on the Villa's grounds. Puṣṭimārg ritual specialists (*mukhiyās*) have been hired to maintain the daily domestic *sevā* practices which used to take place at her in-laws home. The women who would come for *satsaṅg* and observed *darśan* at her mother-in-law's residence have followed the *svarūp* and congregate at Dini's house fairly often. Dini, who has a PhD in Chemistry, fondly acknowledges how her mother-in-law was a "different kind of person, above this world." Not only has Dini preserved the century-long worship of her in-law's *svarūp*, she explains how there is a trust in place, which will guarantee the continued maintenance of *sevā* after they pass away.

Lay practitioners, like Sapna Amin, say they will never impose the rite of initiation on their new daughter-in-laws. They are also not expecting their own children or *bahūs* to continue performing *sevā* after they have passed away. Sapna, who comes from a Svāminārāyaṇ Vaiṣṇav family, was asked to receive *dīkṣā* by her Puṣṭimārgī mother-in-law who made it clear that no one would eat any food cooked by Sapna unless she received initiation before the wedding. Like Bhavana and Ganga, Sapna initially did not feel emotionally involved in her daily performance of *sevā*. Although she now admits that *sevā* has become an important aspect of her day, Sapna says she will not “force” her new daughter-in-laws to do the same. She understands how demanding the daily practice of *sevā* – with its purity and dietary rules – can be for a daughter-in-law who was not raised in a Puṣṭimārgī family, especially if she does not have support from her husband.

Sapna’s experience also demonstrates how the practice of *sevā* can become a site of tension between women and their husbands. As our conversation progressed Sapna explained how her husband, a wealthy business man, is out of the house for most of the day but requires her unequivocal attention when he is at home. At times, she says, her husband becomes upset if she spends too much time doing *sevā* at the expense of fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother and wife. Therefore, Sapna performs *sevā* for a relative short amount of time every day (about forty-five minutes) and only performs *sevā* once her husband has left for work. However, this is not to suggest that only the men in a Puṣṭimārg family are drawing the boundaries between women’s religious activities and household duties or dictating the degree to which their wives can be involved in the performance of domestic *sevā*. Several women expressed that taking care of their family is indeed the primary responsibility of a mother and wife, a responsibility that cannot be

abandoned or neglected at the expense of their *sevā* practices. After all, Puṣṭimārg is a householder tradition that does not place a high value on renunciation or ascetic withdrawal from family life. As one woman told me, “where does it say that we should stop taking care of our family to do *sevā*?”

Although the custom of married women adopting the religious practices of their in-laws is expected and usually accepted by incoming *bahūs*, I have encountered several examples of women who decided to obtain Puṣṭimārg *dīkṣā* later in life, or who have continued to perform *sevā* in their new homes, even if their in-laws are not Puṣṭimārgī. Neelima Patel, who married when she was twenty years old, decided to receive initiation a dozen years after her marriage. Her mother-in-law was an orthodox Svāmīnārāyaṇ follower, and so Neelima kept both her initiation and her *sevā* practices a secret for many years. She also still continued visiting Svāmīnārāyaṇ temples as well as Puṣṭimārg *havelīs*. Now, many years later, her son and daughter both received *dīkṣā* and her daughter-in-law is also Puṣṭimārgī. Neelima admits that if there was ever any point of contention between her and her *sās* it was because she was Puṣṭimārgī and her mother-in-law was Svāmīnārāyaṇ.

Payal Patel presents an example of how some women have continued with their Puṣṭimārg practices in their in-laws homes. Payal received *dīkṣā* when she was eight years old and learnt all aspects of Puṣṭimārg *sevā* from her grandmother. Sometime after she married into a wealthy non-Puṣṭimārgī Gujarati family, her mother passed away leaving Payal with her personal *svarūp*.¹⁵⁵ Payal decided to continue performing *sevā* to

¹⁵⁵ Normally after a practitioner passes away, their personal *svarūp* needs to undergo a re-consecration ceremony in order to be worshiped again. During the consecration ceremony the *svarūp* is touched by a

the *svarup* in her in-laws' home and eventually even Payal's husband, Chetanbhai, obtained *dīkṣā* and has since been participating by performing the morning *maṅgal ārti* with her. Her children and daughter-in-law have also received *dīkṣā* and assist her occasionally in performing daily *sevā*. For a brief period of time even Payal's mother-in-law performed daily *sevā* with them, and recently her sister-in-law (Chetanbhai's sister), Rukmini Shukla, has also obtained initiation.

Rukmini Shukla, who comes from a wealthy upper-class family, is the woman who first invited me to the Vaiṣṇav "kitty-party" at Bhavna's home (see page 216). Rukmini became exposed to *sevā* practices and Puṣṭimārg religious culture in general through her kinship ties with Payal (her brother's wife). Like most women I worked with in Ahmedabad, Rukmini did not learn all aspects of *sevā* from a "*sevā* manual" or *paddhati*. Instead she learned how to perform *sevā* from Payal, her Puṣṭimārg friends, and she says she also draws inspiration for *śṛṅgār* (adornment) ideas from her occasional visits to the *havelī* during festivals. It was only after visiting the pilgrimage town of Nathdwara in 2000 that Rukmini says she was inspired to finally obtain *dīkṣā* and purchase a Śrīnāthjī *svarūp*. Rukmini received *dīkṣā* without telling her husband, and while laughing softly, she recalls the moment she called him and said "I'm Vaiṣṇav!". Her husband asked if she will start doing *sevā* at home; he was concerned that she would become too involved and invest too much time in it.

Rukmini's husband's family is Śākta, and worship to Devī still continues in the home. Her *sās* did not mind when Rukmini obtained initiation in Puṣṭimārg, and she has

Gosvāmī. He bathes the image with five sacred substances (*pañcāmṛt*: milk, curd, honey, clarified butter, and sugar), and offers it *prasād* from a previously established *svarūp*.

accepted the change in Rukmini's daily mode of living as a result of her new religious affiliations, such as only eating meals after they are offered to her Ṭhākurjī. Rukmini has Brahmin cooks, and her maids have also received initiation, so she is not worried about breaching any purity rules if they assist her in making preparations for her performance of daily *sevā* and during festivals. I asked her about her children; her two sons have undergone the first stage of initiation. Rukmini also insists that she will not force initiation upon any future daughter-in-laws: "If they do my *sevā* [in the sense of 'taking care' of her]," Rukmini explains, "so that I can continue doing my *sevā* [to Śrīnāthjī], then it is as though they are doing *sevā* indirectly." She uses this same logic to explain how, even though her husband performs minimal *sevā*, he nevertheless "does the *most sevā* since, after all, he gives me the money to do it!" This notion was echoed by several women, that is, without their husband's support, in the form of their general acceptance as well as their explicit financial support, many women would not be able to continue performing *sevā*.

It is in the context of these ever-expanding and overlapping circles of women who are connected through marriage and other social-networks that I became interested in exploring the points of intersection between domestic *sevā*, women's participation, and the production of class among Puṣṭimārg families. This chapter began with a short description of my visit to Bhavna Patel's home, where she was hosting the afternoon kitty party. In her bungalow twelve women – some of whom we have already encountered, such as Ganga, Payal, Sapna, and Neelima – were gathered for the occasion, which they variously referred to as a "Vaiṣṇav Kitty Party", "Gopī Maṇḍal" (circle of *gopīs*), or *satsaṅg*. Some women in this group are friends, while others are related through

marriage, such as Bhavna and Ganga, and Payal and Rukmini. The afternoon Vaiṣṇav *satsaṅg*, which has been going on for at least seven years, is hosted by one member of the group once a month. They said that the gathering not only provided an opportunity for socializing, but also served as a venue for discussing various topics related to Puṣṭimārg theology and ritual praxis. Here they discuss topics from a Puṣṭimārg text (such as a *vārtā*, or a text on *sevā*), plan pilgrimage tours, and also exchange recipes for food-offering preparations and designs for *śṛṅgār* decorations to be used in daily *sevā*.

In speaking to the women I discovered that Ganga's in-law, Nina Patel, was also present at the gathering. Both of Ganga's daughters married Nina's sons. Nina acknowledges how her interest in performing *sevā* was definitely promoted, if not entirely prompted by, her social and family connections with Ganga. Not only did both of Nina's daughter-in-laws come from a Puṣṭimārgī family, but Nina would also be invited by their mother, Ganga, to the monthly kitty party or *satsaṅg* gatherings where she had the opportunity to meet other women from the Puṣṭimārg community. When I met with Nina individually, I learnt that she decided to undergo initiation five years ago and has since practiced *sevā* everyday. When I asked how her husband felt about her new religious interests and practices she explained that he was entirely indifferent, providing neither protest nor overt support. Pointing to the ten-foot high Śrīnāthjī statue in her lobby, Nina acknowledges how it was in fact her husband's idea to purchase and install the large image ten years ago. Curiously enough, this image was purchased well before her initiation into the tradition. Both Nina's desire to become an active member of the Puṣṭimārg community (which includes many women from her own social network) and her husband's purchase of a Śrīnāthjī image – only to be displayed as a religious

commodity in their foyer – demonstrate how sectarian affiliations and styles of domestic rituals are informed by class and community associations. It was clear that even before Nina decided to receive initiation, her social network consisted of many members from the Puṣṭimārg community, so much so that both their sons married young women from a Puṣṭimārg family. Nina and her husband also felt it was natural to purchase and display a Puṣṭimārg image in their home. Large, opulent Puṣṭimārg images can, therefore, serve dual functions: as religious commodities they can mark one's elite status as Puṣṭimārgī, however, as mere commodities (often displayed in the homes of non-Puṣṭimārgīs) they can symbolize the necessary cultural and symbolic capital needed to reproduce class status and maintain social respectability.

All the women who come together for their monthly Vaiṣṇav *satsaṅg* are college or university educated and come from wealthy Gujarati families. They also married into families of similar economic class and social status, and were either already performing domestic *sevā* beforehand (like Payal, for example) or became interested in doing so through their associations with each other after they were married (as with Rukmini, Nina, and Neelima). Indeed, the practice of domestic *sevā* is one of the ways through which these women manage their social ties with each other. Moreover, the specific social spaces or settings created as result of their practice of, and interest in, domestic *sevā* are both informed by and help reproduce and perpetuate sectarian identities and class hierarchies.

Class, *Kīrtans*, and Classical Genres: Singing Songs of the *Havelī* in the Home

In addition to their monthly *satsaṅg* gatherings, another occasion on which many of the women come together is during their weekly *kīrtan* lessons. For the last three years, Nina Patel has been organizing two and half hour *kīrtan* tutorials, twice a week in her home. The women made sure to point out that their instructor, Krishnakumar Nayak, is the son of a *kīrtankār* trained in the “classical style of *havelī saṅgīt*,” or Puṣṭimārg temple music.¹⁵⁶ By paying a nominal fee to a trained Puṣṭimārg singer-musician, the women are learning how to sing the songs of the famous Puṣṭimārg poets in the manner that they have been sung in *havelīs* for centuries. The question of when and how these Brajhbhāṣā poetic compositions began to circulate outside the temple context and in the homes of lay practitioners is difficult to ascertain. Hand-written compilations of *havelī kīrtans* have been passed down from the seventeenth and eighteenth century. While published versions, such as the standard four-volume *kīrtan* collection, the *Puṣṭimārg Kīrtan Saṁgrah*, which is in use in all *havelīs* today, was published towards the end of the nineteenth century (Ho 2013, 214). Zealous lay practitioners can find and purchase this four-volume collection, containing over ten-thousand *kīrtans*, at large *havelīs* in

¹⁵⁶ Krishnakumar Nayak, who is also known as Krishnakumar, received his musical training from Gosvāmī Natvargopālji beginning in 1994 at the Natvarlāl Shyāmlāl *havelī* (belonging to the first house), Dosiwada ni pole, Ahmedabad. Krishnakumar explains how his great grandfather, Chabildas Nayak, grandfather, Campaklal Nayak, and father, Ghanshyamdas Nayak, all sang in Puṣṭimārg *havelīs*, as well as on television and radio shows. Krishnakumar also performs in *havelīs* when invited, especially during special occasions and festivals. He accompanies Gosvāmīs who tour internationally to places like the UK, Singapore, Australia, and east Africa. He has also been giving lessons to women like Nina and her friends for more than a decade, and sees it as a legitimate mode for continuing the tradition of temple singing: “during *sevā* what is sung is *pure havelī saṅgīt*.” Krishnakumar explains how only a limited number of *havelīs* have full-time *kīrtankārs*. “We have to do our own marketing now,” he admits. He also acknowledges how important the financial contribution of wealthy Vaiṣṇavs is to maintaining *havelī* liturgical traditions. He sees laypeople’s interest in taking *havelī kīrtan* lessons as a form of devotional commitment, on the one hand, and a continuation of Vaiṣṇav patronage practices, on the other hand (Personal communication, February 1st 2010).

Nathdwara and Kankroli. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter four, printed collections of Puṣṭimārg songs, such as Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai’s *Vividh dhol tathā padsaṃgrah* (1913) and *Kīrtansaṃgrah* (1936), which include Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans* as well as Gujarati *dhols* and *garbās*, can be found in the private collections of many Puṣṭimārg households. Most of the women I visited use these collections or have memorized many well-known *kīrtans* and sing them while performing *sevā*. They do so by simply reciting the lyrics without a formal melody or sing them in a tune of their own choosing. However, as many of the women who had gathered for this *kīrtan* lesson expressed to me, these lessons presented an opportunity for them to learn how to sing the compositions of the famous Puṣṭimārg poets “properly,” in their temple style.

I accompanied Krishnakumar one day to another *kīrtan* session, hosted at the home of Lataben Shah, and which was overseen by Vrajlata (Raja) *beṭījī* (Figure 3).¹⁵⁷ There were about fifteen middle-aged women seated on the floor in Lataben’s large living room, in which several images of Śrīnāthjī were displayed. Some of the women gathered there, such as Neelima and Ganga, were already known to me. After singing a few *dhols* composed by Raja *beṭījī*’s grandmothers, Vrajpriya and Kamalpriya, Raja *beṭījī* asked some of the women to sing a few *kīrtans*, which they were apparently supposed to have practiced at home. After Krishnakumar sang the first refrain while playing the harmonium, some women nervously repeated after him. Soon, though, Raja *beṭījī* clucked her tongue and shook her head disapprovingly. She then demonstrated how the songs should be sung – with the help of Krishnakumar – of course. Clearly, the women had not

¹⁵⁷ Raja *beṭījī* is the aunt of Tilak bāvā or Madhusudhan Gosvāmī from the Natvarlāl Shyāmlāl *havelī* (first house) in Ahmedabad. Raja *beṭījī* is married and has children. She hosts weekly *satsaṅg* gatherings in her home and also supervises *kīrtan* lessons at the home of Puṣṭimārg female patrons.

practiced enough. This continued for another forty-five minutes to an hour. At the end of the session, Krishnakumar asked the women to try and practice more at home for there might be “surprise exams” given at any moment. Before the group dispersed, Lataben’s housemaids served everyone snacks and *chāī* and the women had an opportunity to socialize.



Figure 3. Krishnakumar Nayak giving a *kīrtan* lesson to Puṣṭimārg women in the home of Lataben Shah.

Another woman, Pujaben Shah, who is not socially connected to any of the upper-class Puṣṭimārg women discussed above, graciously invited me to her home one evening. I happened to come to her house when she was nearing the end of her daily *sevā*. In a spontaneous gesture, she asked if I wanted to watch her perform the last few moments of her practice, which included *śayan*, when she closes the doors to her household shrine and places Śrīnāthjī to sleep.¹⁵⁸ As she was about to sing a few *kīrtans*

¹⁵⁸ Generally, Puṣṭimārgīs do not allow non-initiated individuals to touch any of their *sevā* offerings, especially before they have performed *sevā*, or observe their *sevā* practices.

from her copy of the *havelī Kīrtan Saṃgrah* collection, she paused and in a somewhat apologetic tone said that she cannot sing these *kīrtans* in the manner of women who have taken *kīrtan* classes. When we spoke later she explained how she knows some women who go for *kīrtan* lessons, in the evenings, between 8pm-9pm once a week. When I asked if she has attended classes such as these or would like to do so, she responded by saying “How can I? I would like to learn how to sing these *kīrtans* properly but I can’t go. My husband comes home at that time. I also don’t have a scooter or a car in which I can travel at that late hour.” What stood out from this conversation and other similar conversations with women who did not have the time or means needed for attending *kīrtan* lessons was that they, too, were referring to a “proper” or “correct” way of singing *kīrtans*, that is, in their traditional *rāg* or melody

At this time, it is important to point out that the same *rāg* performed in Puṣṭimārg contexts sounds different from its Hindustani classical rendition (Ho 2013, 225). Hindustani classical vocal music is characterized by three prominent styles and genres: *dhrupad*, *khyāl*, and *thumrī*. The elitist re-making of these traditions as simultaneously “classical” and national in the early twentieth century was embedded in larger cultural nationalist projects, which sought to construct an authentic, pure Hindu culture and tradition.¹⁵⁹ Meilu Ho has painstakingly attempted to demonstrate the historical influence of the Puṣṭimārg *kīrtan* repertoires on the development of Hindustani vocal traditions (2006; 2013). Although some contemporary performers of classical Hindustani music do acknowledge these connections, *havelī saṅgīt* is not generally

¹⁵⁹ With regards to Hindustani classical vocal music, Dard Neuman traces the general trajectory of this process in his doctoral work, *A House of Music* (2004), while Janaki Bhakle focuses this discussion on two men, Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, and their roles as the “key orchestrators of music’s modernization” (2005, 5).

counted among north Indian “classical” musical genres.¹⁶⁰ So what does it mean when *havelī saṅgīt* practitioners – such as Puṣṭimārg hereditary musicians and their students – say they are singing in a “classical” style? For Puṣṭimārgīs, *havelī saṅgīt* is elevated as a classical genre due to its centuries long preservation in a “closed system,” that of the *havelī* and via a lineage of hereditary *kīrtankārs*. The performance of temple *kīrtans* also relies on *rāgs*, traditional melodies associated with courtly music in north India.

Although this system of *rāgs* is the same as that used by classical musicians, it is not considered constitutive of Hindu classical music art as it was reinvented in the twentieth century. Finally, the composition of the *kīrtan* repertoires in the canonical language of Brajbhāṣā further reifies the genre’s elite status over and above other performance genres such as Gujarati *garbās* and *dhols*.

Learning to sing the songs of the Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* in their “authentic” style is not the only mode by which the *havelī kīrtans* have begun to circulate out of their traditional milieu and into the homes of lay practitioners. It marks yet another shift in performance contexts that the Puṣṭimārg temple repertoires have endured over the past decades. As noted above, published *kīrtan* compilations have been available since the turn of the century. In terms of their performance, Meilu Ho demonstrates how Puṣṭimārg singers have recorded and performed their music at public venues such as the government owned All India Radio and at national institutions like the Indian National Theatre for the last thirty to forty years (2006, 196). In fact, All India Radio played a key role in

¹⁶⁰ Classical Hindustani vocal artists such as Aminuddin Dagar of the Dagar family, Pandit Jasraj, and Naina Devi have commented on the associations between *havelī saṅgīt* and north Indian classical music traditions (Ho 2013, 225).

popularizing the term “*havelī saṅgīt*” when it began using the phrase in the 1970s (2013, 232fn10).

Puṣṭimārg temples and wealthy patrons have also helped sponsor recordings of songs by both hereditary *kīrtankārs* and non-hereditary performers since the 1970s and 80s. Since this time, moreover, Hindustani classical vocalists have been recording albums of Puṣṭimārg liturgical songs that both lay practitioners and the general public can purchase and listen to in their homes. This has indeed shaped the representation of *havelī saṅgīt* as “classical music” in the popular imagination and has reified this understanding for Puṣṭimārgīs. CDs and mp3s, such as *Mangal Swara*, *Krishna Seva Haveli Sangeet*, or *Soor Padavali* by singers like Subha Mudgal, Sajan Mishra, and Ravindra Sathe effectively reproduce a liturgical day of *havelī kīrtans* (228). Our very own Krishnakumar has several CDs out as well, such as *Giriraj ki sharan*, *Shrinathji Pyara*, and *Aao Kirtan Sikhe* – the last title literally means, “Come, Let’s Learn Kirtan.” Finally, the temple repertoires have also been performed on the modern concert stage by Puṣṭimārg *kīrtankārs* and by well-known Hindustani classical vocal artists such as Pundit Jasraj and Shruti Sadolikar Katkar.

The decline in traditional forms of temple patronage, colonial modernity, and nationalist reinventions of classical music have all enabled the democratization of hereditary musical forms. Hereditary musicians, adapting to this milieu, are forced to reconsider their pedagogical styles to meet new types of demands. As Janaki Bakhle argues, by the twentieth century, music became a “classical” or “traditional” art form that “occupied pride of place in the national imagination. While its upper-level pedagogy

remained dominated by hereditary musicians, it became possible even for respectable middle-class Hindu housewives to imagine themselves as performers” (4).

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic ideologies also promoted the notion that, in addition to cleaning and arranging the home, keeping accounts, and taking care of their children, another way housewives could transform the home into a blissful sanctuary for their working husbands was to sing “pleasant songs” or play a musical instrument. Journals like the *Stribodh* suggested to their female readers to “Sing or play a musical instrument to help your husband relax when he returns home” (Shukla 1991, 65). Indeed, as Amada Weidman argues – with reference to south Indian Karnāṭak music – “for many Brahmin elites, the sign of the successful classicization of music and dance from the 1920s to 1940s was the transformation of these forms into ‘arts’ fit for upper-caste, middle-class ‘family women’” (2006, 115). Much like needle-work, classical music – through either listening to it or playing it – ensured the production of proper domesticity by occupying the leisure time of upper-class housewives, who did not have to work outside the home and whose time was made free with the help of housemaids and cooks.¹⁶¹

The domestication and “spiritualization” of classical music, through its embodiment by upper-caste respectable housewives went hand in hand with its rise as a national art form. This process also involved the marginalization of professional female performers, such as *tawaiḥs* and *devādāsīs*, who sang and danced in public from the late

¹⁶¹ Amanda Weidman describes an advertisement for the South India Music Emporium from the 1930s, which appeared in the concert program of the Madras Music Academy. The ad “counselled male concertgoers on how to connect the bourgeois public sphere of the classical concert hall with its domestic equivalent” (2006, 138). The ad read as follows: “A modern wife has tons of unemployed leisure and a wise husband must provide hobbies for her leisure being usefully employed. What better and more soul-satisfying hobby can there be than violin playing. Give your wife a violin today and ensure eternal happiness at home” (138).

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁶² For example, *thumrī*, a genre that was traditionally associated with the *tawaif* courtesan-performer has survived to this day and even became reconstituted as a form of Hindustani classical music art because it was cleansed of erotic lyrics and dissociated from its early dance associations namely, with the bodies of *tawaifs* (Du Perron 54-56; see footnote 162). Classical singing and dancing became suitable art forms for middle-class housewives to engage with only when professional female performers like *tawaifs* and *devādāsīs* were replaced by upper-caste, respectable married women.¹⁶³

I understand that *havelī saṅgīt* was not part of this nationalization project, which also then excluded it from being “reinvented” as a form of Hindustani vocal music art. Moreover, *havelī saṅgīt* is still the preserve of hereditary Puṣṭimārg male *kīrtankārs*,

¹⁶² *Tawaif* singer-dancers (also known as *bāījī*), represented a north Indian courtesan performance tradition, which was an important social, economic, and artistic fixture in both *navābī* courtly life and in salon contexts from the early 1800s. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, eugenics, British occupations with national physical and moral health, and the growing concern over the rise in venereal disease rates among British soldiers in colonial cantonments, led to the legislation of the Cantonment Act (1864) and the Contagious Diseases Act (1868) in India (Levine 2003). These acts specifically targeted women whose sexuality and sexual practices seemed ambivalent and, thus, threatening – namely, those women who did not conform to emerging Victorian and Indian upper-caste, middle class notions of respectable womanhood. The most explicit example of such a woman was the Indian prostitute, however, other women were rapidly subsumed under this identity, such as courtesans and professional female performers. In south India, these reforms took the form of the “anti-nautch” movement, launched by the upper-caste reformer, Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919) in the 1890s (Soneji 2012). The anti-nautch movement (nautch > *nāc*, “to dance”) focused on the lifestyles of a community of hereditary female courtesan performers known as *devadāsīs*. This movement culminated into significant legal interventions, catalyzed by the efforts of Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy (1866-1968). The Madras (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947, which was eventually passed by the government of independent India, successfully outlawed the artistic and social practices of *devadāsī* women. According to Amelia Maciszewski (2006), the discourses surrounding the anti-nautch movement as well as subsequent legal interventions promoted by upper-caste reformers, made their way up to north India, leading to the social and artistic displacement of *tawaifs* as well. Just like the male members of the *devadāsī* community, who escaped the social and aesthetic stigmatization brought on by reform efforts, the hereditary male singer-musician of north Indian classical traditions, the *ustād*, remained safe from such displacement. Indeed, the *ustād* continues to hold a prominent position on the concert stage, if he is not entirely revered as a national celebrity (Neuman 33). On the other hand, the *tawaif*'s relationship “to Indian music became marginalized from history as she became severed from a practice that was ultimately to be performed, respectably, by middle-class women” (33).

¹⁶³ As Janaki Bakhle notes, “A whole generation of courtesans (*baijis*) has been replaced by upper-caste women performers”(5). See also Morcom (2013).

as it has been for centuries, and did not have to be “sanitized” the way the performance cultures of *tawaiḥs* and *devadāsīs* were. However, its construction as an unadulterated “source” of classical Hindustani music traditions by both scholars like Meilu Ho (2006, 2013) and by contemporary Hindustani classical musicians – who have been performing *havelī saṅgīt* on the modern concert stage for decades – has changed the pedagogy and performance styles of *havelī saṅgīt*. The contemporary phenomenon of elite Puṣṭimārg women taking *kīrtan* lessons can be understood through these larger discourses of middle-class modernities, which successfully forged connections between the performing arts, Hindu religion or “spirituality,” and ideal womanhood.

Havelī kīrtans as well as the “erotic-themed” *garbās* and *dhols* of Puṣṭimārg were religious songs to begin with. They did not need to be further imbued with devotional connotations to be made more acceptable. However, the process of sanitizing Puṣṭimārgī women’s religious performance practices involved the labeling and replacement of “uncultured” performance genres with more respectable and elitist ones. Participating in *havelī saṅgīt* classes is not only considered an appropriate leisurely *and* devotional activity for upper-class Puṣṭimārg women to engage in today but it is constitutive of the many novel ways lay practitioners are continuing to reproduce and perpetuate an elite Puṣṭimārg identity. By making claims to a “classical” genre, as opposed to the popular genres of *garbās* and *dhols*, upper-class Puṣṭimārg women are distinguishing themselves from Puṣṭimārg women who do not conform to the bourgeois aesthetics of *havelī saṅgīt* namely, those women who do not and cannot pay for *kīrtan* lessons.

As we discussed in chapter four, from at least the early nineteenth century female laity (though not to the exclusion of men) have been singing *garbā* and *dhol* compositions in both domestic and public settings such as during *sevā*, in Puṣṭimārg women's *bhajan maṇḍalīs* ("singing circle") and *satsaṅg* groups, as well as in *havelīs* during festivals and *in between darśans*. Nineteenth century reform movements targeted the singing of erotic-themed *dhol* *garbās* before Gosvāmīs and on *havelī* grounds. This, combined with the "in-between" status of Puṣṭimārg *dhol*s and *garbās*, where they are not part of temple liturgy, has excluded them from nationalist processes of classicization and kept them outside the purview of Puṣṭimārg scholarship.

Raja *beṭījī*, with whom Krishnakumar conducted the *kīrtan* lesson at Lataben's home, also hosts *satsaṅg* sessions at her household, where twenty to thirty women gather every week. *Satsaṅg* gatherings normally involve Raja *beṭījī* leading a discussion around a *vārtā* narrative, a Puṣṭimārg theological concept, or answering any religious or personal questions women may have. However, before commencing and at the concluding of such *satsaṅg* sessions, the women who gather sing from a texts like *Vrajsudhā*, which contains Gujarati *dhol*s and *garbās* composed by Raja *beṭījī*'s grandmothers, Vrajpriya *bahūjī* and Kamalpriya *bahūjī* (see page 189). The atmosphere at Raja *beṭījī*'s house during one such *satsaṅg* gathering was strikingly different from Lataben's home, where I had attended the *kīrtan* classes. Here, as time passed, the singing and clapping became louder, more energetic, and some women even begin to dance. Raja *beṭījī* explained how many more women attend these types of *satsaṅg* sessions than *kīrtan* classes since the *kīrtan* lessons sometimes take up more time (two hours, twice a week) and there is also a nominal fee attached. Upper and upper-middle class women, like Neelima, Ganga, and Nina, who

have hired help at home and personal drivers with cars, can afford to expend the time for such lessons. Their elite status is further demonstrated by both their claims to a “classical” genre and their ability to pay for *havelī saṅgīt* classes.

Consuming Kṛṣṇa: Women, Class, and the Ritual Economies of Domestic *Sevā*

In addition to taking lessons in *havelī saṅgīt*, another mode through which women participate in the production of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities is through forms of material culture. In many of the upper-class Puṣṭimārgī homes I visited, opulent religious commodities, such as statues and embossed paintings of Śrīnāthjī, were inevitably displayed in living rooms and foyers. Such paintings can range anywhere from 7,000 to 30,000 rupees (\$150-\$750). Moreover, the construction of *sevā* rooms, separate “temples” on an estate, separate kitchen areas for preparing ritual offerings, and a vast array of purchased ritual accessories attest to an elevated economic status and indicate the existence of disposable income. For instance, in her large bungalow, Rukmini Shukla has a separate room for performing *sevā* made entirely out of white marble, and the shrine in which she places her *svarūp* is crafted in silver. During specific festivals, such as *hiṅḍolā* (“swing festival”) Rukmini decorates the room with ritual accoutrements, flowers, and even props to represent scenes from Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*. She explained how these decorations can sometimes take many days to prepare, but noted that the result is always worth it. In fact, Rukmini mentioned that it was after seeing one of her festival decorations that her *devrānī* (her husband’s younger brother’s wife) became interested in performing *sevā* and underwent initiation. When I asked if she makes any of the *śṛṅgār* clothes herself, Rukmini said that she does so occasionally and although “women with little money

perhaps have to stitch them from their own clothes, others can make Śrīnāthjī's clothes with the latest fabric designs available in the market." Another woman I met at the kitty party, Parul Patel, has most of the jewelry and clothes required for *sevā* custom-made by her family jeweler and tailor. When I asked Rukmini whether she prefers performing *sevā* at home or going to the *havelī* for *darśan*, she said that she only goes to the *havelī* on occasion, to visit the Mahārāj, her guru. As she explains, "only those individuals who perhaps don't have an active social life, or can't do *sevā* at home, go to the *havelī* to learn and be inspired." The performance of *sevā* in domestic contexts are actions by which women, like Rukmini and Parul, negotiate and assert their privileged socio-economic status. Separate rooms constructed for domestic shrines and food preparation, and the sheer array of purchased ritual accessories undoubtedly assert class privilege.

Most of the women I worked with who belong to upper-class Puṣṭimārg families only visit *havelīs* a few times a month or during festivals and special occasions. Many also purchase the ritual accoutrements for use in *sevā* from stalls and bazaars located on *havelī* grounds or through custom-made orders. They certainly do not go to the *havelī* for *darśan* daily, as other women do, nor do they volunteer for the daily preparation of flower garlands (used for adornment during *sevā*) at *havelīs*. Rukmini's explanation as to why women go to the *havelī* often – because "they can't do *sevā* at home" – demonstrates how the practice of domestic *sevā* becomes implicated in the production of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity, at least for and among women like Rukmini. As chapter one and two illustrated, wealthy Puṣṭimārg families have publically patronized the sect for several centuries now. Families have hosted ritual celebrations such as *manoraths* ("votive observance") at the *havelī*, sponsored food-offerings like *rāj-bhog*,

subsidized the construction of *havelīs* or their renovations, built rest-houses (*dharmasālās*), and donated gifts to Gosvāmīs or *bahūjīs*. Historically, such donative activities have been key sites for the production and articulation of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and mercantile prestige (Haynes 1991, 38). Even today, Puṣṭimārg families continue to participate in such *havelī*-centered acts of patronage.¹⁶⁴

However, as I demonstrate in this project, domestic *sevā* has also been an integral part of Puṣṭimārgī lay practitioners' lives. Narratives from the *vārtās*, historical references, as well as a plethora of *sevā* guides indicate that a variety of food items and ritual accoutrements are required for the performance of *sevā*. It is not entirely possible to date how early ritual items, meant for use in domestic ritual, became available to purchase in market contexts. In the Mahārāja Libel Case, for example, Jadunathji Gosvāmī describes that religious images "...are sold in the bazaar for purposes of worship by the Vaishnavas" (348). Drawing from an historical reference such as this, one can hypothesize that bazaars in and around Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* have been selling ritual items for lay practitioners to purchase since the early-mid nineteenth century, if not earlier. As Kajri Jain argues, by the nineteenth century, bazaars came to characterize "the imbrication of commerce and religion" (2012, 188). Indeed, pilgrimage traffic to large *havelīs* in towns like Nathdwara, where lay Puṣṭimārgīs made donations to the *havelī* as well as purchased religious paraphernalia and *sevā* items in the temple bazaars,

¹⁶⁴ Today one can easily find the cost of sponsoring religious activities at the Nathdwara *havelī* on the *havelī*'s website: www.nathdwaratemple.org. The cost of sponsoring a full-day *manorath* is Rs. 17, 300 (\$290 USD); full *rāj-bhog* is Rs. 10, 350 (\$173 USD); half *rāj-bhog* is Rs. 6, 700 (\$112 USD); donating pistachios to the *havelī* kitchen costs Rs. 11,000 (\$184), and so on. I also attended several *manoraths* at *havelīs*, including one where the family was celebrating the graduation of their son, who had just returned from the US after having completed a degree in Engineering. In addition to being an act of devotion, hosting such celebratins provide occasions for elite Puṣṭimārgīs to display and reproduce family status.

contributed to the overall revenue of *havelīs* and their custodians.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, in a place like Nathdwara, Puṣṭimārg’s cultic centre, hereditary communities of artists have for centuries been responsible for producing miniature paintings, *picchvāīs* (backdrop paintings for the temple image), manuscript illustrations, and portraits commissioned by the *havelī* and its Gosvāmīs (Ambalal 1987; Lyons 2004; Jain 2012, 195). These same artists also produced “souvenir” paintings as well as images for Puṣṭimārg lay practitioners to purchase.

Over time, global capitalist economies have encouraged the large-scale production and circulation of ritual and religious items in market cultures (Sinha 2010). Increased commodified styles of domestic *sevā* by upper-class Puṣṭimārg women are now marked by the purchase of expensive ritual accoutrements, the construction of custom-made domestic shrines, and the use of “the latest fabric designs” for the *svarūp*’s clothing. Material expressions of one’s sectarian identity and devotion are continuing to evolve as consumer cultures extend their influence to areas of domestic ritual praxis. Furthermore, the imbrication of domesticity, ideal womanhood, and class in early reformist and nationalist rhetoric have enabled domestic ritual contexts to become arenas for cultural consumption and display. Together, all of these processes cast the home as a modern site for Puṣṭimārg patronage.

The display of Puṣṭimārg religious commodities in living rooms, entrance ways, or foyers also represents another mode by which the home becomes a locus of elite sectarian identity production. In this discussion, it is useful to understand commodities as objects that “at a certain *phase* in their careers and in a particular *context*, meet the

¹⁶⁵ As Norbert Peabody reminds us, “the dynamics of a healthy pilgrimage economy bound the mutual interests of king, temple, and merchants” (1991, 751).

requirements of commodity candidacy” (Appadurai 1986, 16). That is to say, the placement of a Puṣṭimārg religious item, whether it is displayed in the “commodity context” of a living room and entrance way, or in the domestic shrine, can alter its significance and meaning. Furthermore, one of the primary differences between a ritual item (such as a Kṛṣṇa *svaṛūp* or picture) bought for worship versus one consumed for display is that the former needs to be “made *puṣṭi*” – be imbued with “grace” and “nourishment.”¹⁶⁶ This ritual is performed by a Gosvāmī who bathes the image in *pancāmṛta* (the five “nectars” of curds, milk, ghee, honey, and sugar) and offers the *svaṛūp prasād* (consecrated food offering) from a previously consecrated *svaṛūp*. This transformation from commodity to an enlivened Kṛṣṇa *svaṛūp* marks the occasion when one can begin performing *sevā* to the image. Religious commodities bought for display, however, are not made *puṣṭi* for that would necessitate their constant care and performance of *sevā* by family members.

While the practice of domestic *sevā* by Puṣṭimārg women is not novel, we should appreciate the novel ways in which women’s religious activities have become implicated in the production of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities. This occurs through increased commodified styles of domestic *sevā*, the construction of separate spaces for the performance of *sevā*, as well as the aesthetic choices made in the purchase of both ritual accoutrements used in worship and religious commodities consumed for display. Although the men of such households have traditionally controlled the flow of economic capital, women’s nuanced and imbricating roles as practitioners *and* consumers

¹⁶⁶ Normally, outside the Puṣṭimārg context, images meant for worship are “brought to life” (*prāṇapratīṣṭhā*) through the recitation of certain Sanskrit *mantras*.

transform this into the cultural and symbolic capital needed to maintain Puṣṭimārg family status and respectability.

Women's roles as consumers – and even suppliers – in this evolving “ritual economy” are informed by, and contribute to the reproduction of, class hierarchies. For example, Jinal Shah, a woman who comes from a low income family, does not have a separate ritual space or kitchen for preparing her food offerings, and she makes all the accouterments at home, including the image of Śrīnāthjī she has displayed in her small living room. In fact, she makes a substantial contribution to the family's income by making and selling *śṛṅgār* accessories to women from upper-class Puṣṭimārg families; among her customers are the women who get together for the monthly kitty party.¹⁶⁷ I met other women like Jinal who make and sell *śṛṅgār* accoutrements through Deepaben Seth, who founded a Puṣṭimārg *mahilā maṇḍal* (“women's group”) approximately fourteen years ago in Ahmedabad. Deepaben comes from a lower middle-class Puṣṭimārgī family and makes all her *śṛṅgār* accessories herself. She said that she does *sevā* with whatever means are available to her: “If I don't have money to buy almonds to make *sāmagrī* [food-offerings], then I don't – it doesn't matter, you offer whatever you can.” Deepaben said that she originally started the *mahilā maṇḍal* as a way to gather women together from her neighborhood. Together they sing Puṣṭimārgī songs at homes of people whom were either hosting a Puṣṭimārgī festival or celebrating an auspicious event such as like the birth of a child, a wedding, or even the purchase of a new home.

¹⁶⁷ I was put in touch with Jinal through the help of Rukmini Shukla. Rukmini told me that she, and other women from her social network, purchase custom-made accoutrements from Jinal fairly often.

One Saturday afternoon I was invited to such an event at the flat of Meena Shah. Approximately twenty women were gathered there and many of them were from Deepaben's *maṇḍal* group. For about an hour several women sang Gujarati *dhols* from printed and even hand-written texts, while other women joined in during the refrain. They even danced to *garbās* to which they all sang to together as a group (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Puṣṭimārg women dancing and singing *garbā*.

At the end of the session food was served and the women soon began talking about personal matters, their family lives, or upcoming weekend plans. At the commencement or conclusion of these sessions the hosting family usually offers a donation that Deepaben collects and uses for other activities and services, such as pilgrimage tours, buying supplies, and providing money to any member of the *maṇḍal* who may need financial assistance. With these donations Deepaben was also able to open a small workshop near her home, where some of the women from the *mahilā maṇḍal* come to make and package *śṛṅgār* accessories. These accessories are then sold through orders received by word of mouth or sometimes at stalls that Deepaben and other women from the *maṇḍal* set up at local *havelīs*. Deepaben acknowledges the economic benefits

that such an organization offers to women coming from low-income families, but she also insists that the activities they organize allow them to get together and socialize. Ultimately, she emphasizes the community-based bonds she and the other women share: “These women will take care of me. They will be there when something is wrong.” She also adds jokingly, “and of course our daughters-in-law are probably happy that their mothers-in-law are out of the house for a few hours!” These occurrences provide us with a counterpoint to the kinds of elite cultural practices, such as attending *havelī saṅgīt* classes and organizing Vaiṣṇav kitty parties that we have already observed among upper-class Puṣṭimārgī women. Such shifts in performance contexts and practices inform and are informed by evolving Puṣṭimārg class politics, which women, through their religious practices and aesthetic choices, continue to mold and reproduce.

Returning to Deepaben Seth’s *mahilā maṇḍal*, I once accompanied the ladies from the group to the Vallabhsadan *havelī*.¹⁶⁸ At the *havelī*, Deepaben had a stall selling all the ritual accoutrements made by the women from her *maṇḍal*. Next to them, another woman, Kiran Jhaveri, also had *seva* items on display, such as *svarūp* clothes, jewelry, and she was even selling small porcelain statues of Vallabha and Yamunā. When I began talking to her, and especially after she handed me her business card – which described her as a “*śṛṅgār* specialist” – I soon realized that Kiran ran a “one-woman business” ordering, making, and selling *sevā* accessories. I later came to visit her at her home in Baroda, which she has set up as a makeshift workshop. There, her brother and nephew were working on making artificial and gold plated jewelry pieces for *svarūps*. The family

¹⁶⁸ The Vallabhsadan *havelī* is a trust *havelī* that opened in Ahmedabad in 1976.

also operates a jewelry business, known as “Lālan Jewelers.” However, Kiran, who never married, is responsible for managing all requests and sales associated with *sevā* accessories and religious commodities, such as gold embossed images of Śrīnāthjī (which cost around Rs. 5,000 or \$85 USD). As Kiran explains, “these more expensive images are very popular among Mahārājs and even NRIs [Non-Resident Indians].”

Kiran makes *śṛṅgār* clothes and jewelry for the Puṣṭimārgī laity and also for use in *havelīs*. For over a decade now, she has also been organizing *sevā śivīrs* (“retreats”) two to three times a month during which she teaches women how to make their own *śṛṅgār* accessories and explains how to use them. Anywhere between thirty to eighty women (and occasionally a few retired men) attend these sessions, for which they have to pay an entrance fee. This entrance fee provides them with the supplies they need to make *śṛṅgār* jewelry and clothes. When I asked Kiran if she thinks lay practitioners’ tastes have changed over time, she said yes. She nuanced this point by adding how, “in the past,” individuals were more concerned about things like the “quality of fabric” or “simplicity”; now, however, “it’s about being fancy and different. Originality has decreased and *dikhāvā* [“showiness”] has increased.”

In addition to local *havelīs*, one of the important sites where Puṣṭimārgī women can purchase *śṛṅgār* accoutrements include large pilgrimage towns, like Nathdwara. In Nathdwara one finds hundreds of stalls selling both ritual items for use in domestic *sevā* and also images of Śrīnāthjī bought for displaying in one’s home (Figure 5a and b).



Figures 5a and b. Stalls in Nathdwara where Puṣṭimārgīs can purchase ritual accoutrements for domestic *sevā*.

For several centuries, Nathdwara has been the site of the production of traditional backdrop paintings (*picchvāīs*) and miniature paintings that have been used in Puṣṭimārg ritual.¹⁶⁹ Most hereditary artists I interviewed, including Bansi Lal Sharma, who is now 76 years old, nostalgically admits that Nathdwara is no longer the place where one can find *picchvāīs* or miniature paintings. As another artist, Sanjay Sharma, explains, “Gujarati women, my main clientele, don’t want paintings like that. They want flashy colors, two-dimensional embossed images, contrast colors, gold, diamonds!” (Figure 6). For those who can keep up with such consumer demands, the profession can be profitable. Rajesh Purohit is a self-proclaimed businessman, and *not* a hereditary artist. His family owns theatres, restaurants, perfume, and jewelry stores in Gujarat and Mumbai. However, he recently decided to open up shop in Nathdwara as well, where he sells pieces made by hired workers that are priced anywhere from 10,000 – 60,000 rupees

¹⁶⁹ Elsewhere, scholars have examined the hereditary communities of artists in Nathdwara that produce these items (Ambalal 1987; Lyons, 2004). In an earlier essay, Lyons also discusses the tradition of hereditary female painters from Nathdwara (1997).

(\$170-\$1,000 USD). Women from upper middle-class Puṣṭimārg families are the primary consumers of these kinds of religious commodities, and Rajesh says his business is doing extremely well (Figure 7).



Figure 6. An example of a two-dimensional embossed image of Śrīnāthjī



Figure 7. Hired workers making pieces in the shop of Rajesh Purohit.

Although my conversations with Nathdwara hereditary artists were by no means exhaustive, it is clear that upper-class Puṣṭimārgī women's increasing purchasing power and aesthetic tastes are both dictating modes of artistic production in Nathdwara and elsewhere, and are effecting the standardization of decoration styles and techniques used in domestic *sevā*. Such exercise of aesthetic tastes or stances, Bourdieu argues, “are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept...for the working classes, perhaps their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations” (1984, 57).

Conclusion

Contemporary Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā*, as we have seen, dramatizes gender roles, intra-and extra-family dynamics, and class formation. By organizing events such as monthly Vaiṣṇav kitty parties, practicing increased commodified styles of domestic *sevā*, functioning as the primary consumers and displayers of religious commodities in the home, and arranging for private *kīrtan* lessons, elite Puṣṭimārgī women are engaged in innovative, class-based mechanisms of sectarian identity formation. Together, such religious activities by elite Puṣṭimārg women have cast the home as a modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

In addition to demarcating an elite sectarian identity, upper-class Puṣṭimārg women who have the desire and means to learn how to sing a “classical” genre like *havelī saṅgīt* are legitimizing the canonicity of the temple *kīrtan* repertoire. More importantly, they are making specific moral claims by asserting that the performance of *kīrtans* in the *havelī* style is a more “authentic” or “proper” mode of singing devotional songs while performing *sevā*. There are numerous ways Puṣṭimārg lay followers can position their domestic practices as “morally superior” to others, such as by strictly following *apras* (ritual purity) rules, performing all eight *darśans*, offering adequate food items (such as almonds, cashews, pistachios, which can prove expensive), and never abandoning *sevā*, which can involve some women taking their *svarūps* with them if they leave the house for a prolonged period of time. However, in our discussion, we see how aesthetic and elitist claims made to the *havelī saṅgīt* genre are allowing upper-class Puṣṭimārg women to position their domestic practices – and, by extension, their sectarian identities – as more authentic than others. Moreover, as the primary consumers of both

ritual accoutrements for use in *sevā* and religious commodities for displaying in the home, the aesthetics of Puṣṭimārg domestic practices – couched in the language of “authenticity” – are being cultivated, perpetuated, and standardized by upper-class Puṣṭimārg women.

Conclusion

One of the questions that animated this project is why Puṣṭimārg attracted (and continues to attract) patronage from the wealthy mercantile and business elites of western India. In chapter one I engaged with the historical dimension of this query and argued that the adoption of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity became a key mechanism for mercantile families to continue demonstrating their prestigious status and moral worth. Puṣṭimārg provided a fixed and stable sectarian identity around a deity, Kṛṣṇa, who was already popular in Gujarat. Furthermore, as a popular Vaiṣṇav sectarian tradition, Puṣṭimārg is unique for not placing importance on renunciation and ascetic practices. Unlike other Vaiṣṇav *sampradāys*, such as the Gauḍīya, Vārkarī, Śrīvaiṣṇava, and Svāmīnārāyaṇ traditions, religious leaders and well-known theologians of Puṣṭimārg never became *saṃnyāsīs* (“renouncers”) or spiritual heads of ascetic lineages. Instead the tradition has proved attractive for *baniyā* and *bhāṭiyā* communities because it grounds itself in a “this-worldly” theology and ritual culture, a ritual culture that models itself on familial relationships (*vātsalya bhāv* or “parental love”) and domestic activities (waking Kṛṣṇa in the morning, feeding him lunch, placing him to sleep). This emphasis on the family setting and domesticity in Puṣṭimārg, moreover, moves beyond the realm of rhetoric and allegory. As this thesis has demonstrated, in addition to temple *sevā* (in which the temple is itself envisioned as a home or *havelī*), the practice of domestic *sevā* is integral to the maintenance of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and its performance permeates the quotidian activities of its practitioners.

In this project, I have presented domestic *sevā* as a heuristic lens through which we come to understand and map women's roles in Puṣṭimārg's past and its contemporary manifestations. In our discussion of women's *sevā* rituals within the home – practices that are not circumscribed by normative *pativrata* (“pious wife”) ideologies of auspiciousness, for example – we are confronted with an alternative perspective on women's devotional practices and religious lives. However, it is important not to overly romanticize Puṣṭimārg's *bhakti* ethos as a mode for subverting or “resisting” Brahmanic orthodoxy and patriarchy. Both domestic and *havelī* Puṣṭimārg liturgies are informed by ritual purity and pollution prescriptions, while caste and gender rules have prevented women from the Gosvāmī household from entering the main sanctum of *havelīs* and performing *sevā* to the primary *svarūp*.

In the domestic context, as we have seen, the practice of *sevā* by women is informed by – and helps reproduce – caste hierarchies, gender expectations, and class formation. The rite of initiation and the performance of *sevā* are mechanisms by which a husband's family, especially the mother-in-law, exert their authority on incoming daughter-in-laws. While investing *too much* time on *sevā* practices has also presented instances where the relationship between husbands and wives become strained. Furthermore, as I illustrated in chapter three, the gender and class discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reconstituted the home and women's domestic activities as sites for status production and family respectability. Today, with the proliferation of consumer cultures, increased commodified styles of ritual praxis as well as shifts in aesthetic tastes have also come to inform domestic *sevā* practices and the

ways in which one perpetuates an elite Puṣṭimārg identity. All these processes, together, cast the modern home as a site of Puṣṭimārg patronage. To some degree, however, they also enable the practice of domestic *sevā* to become embedded in the morally laden language of “authenticity.” Claims to authenticity, we have seen, are being made by elite Puṣṭimārg women who have the preference and means for taking *havelī kīrtan* lessons, so that they may sing *kīrtans* in the home in their “proper” temple styles. Indeed, the claim that domestic *sevā* is the “original” and, thus, “authentic” form of Puṣṭimārg *sevā* is among the many contentious issues in contemporary Puṣṭimārg. Many women from upper-class families, who only visit the *havelī* on occasion see other women’s daily attendance at *havelīs* as an indication of such women’s inability to perform *sevā* in their homes or of not having any social and family responsibilities.

Read through the prism of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century reform, especially the discourses surrounding the libel case and women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg, today’s Puṣṭimārg, as it is practiced by the more “respectable” families of Gujarat, can help demonstrate some of the residual effects of these reform campaigns. For example, several recommendations were made by Mulji and other reformers to regulate the activities of women in *havelī* contexts as well as their movement to and from the *havelī*.¹⁷⁰ According to Mulji, it was in the afternoons that female devotees would come visit the *havelī* in large numbers and female and male Puṣṭimārgīs “intermixed promiscuously” during the *darśan* periods (1865, 104). Ultimately, such suggestions

¹⁷⁰ Before the Libel Case began, in 1861, the author of an article in the *Rāst Goftār tatha Satya Prakāś* made the following suggestions concerning the movement of lay women in the *havelīs*: “they should have *darshan* only from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., they should enter the *zenana* only to meet the Maharaj’s wife and daughters..., they should not be allowed to visit in the afternoon, and they should not be allowed to visit the Maharaj to offer him fruit in private” (Shodhan 1997, 133).

were made to limit contact between female practitioners and Gosvāmīs, as well as between female lay practitioners and male practitioners. Among the many solutions proposed included the allotment of specific hours when females could visit the *havelī*, demarcating the spaces where women could move freely while in the *havelī*, and finally introducing female Gosvāmīs to better supervise and manage the activities of lay women in the *havelī* (Sampat 1938, 408-416 qtd in Simpson 2008, 100). One cannot be sure if the limited number of visits made to the *havelī* by many elite Puṣṭimārgī women today represents the culmination of such reform efforts, which intended to regulate the religious activities of women from “respectable” families. The last call to reform (to introduce female Gosvāmīs), moreover, appears to have materialized in the contemporary figure of Indira *beṭījī* Gosvāmī (b. 1939), the second daughter of Madhusudhan Gosvāmī belonging to the sixth house in Surat. Today, Indira *beṭījī* presides over her own *havelī* and is a guru figure to thousands of male and female practitioners. By way of drawing this thesis to an end, I briefly discuss the life and religious activities of Indira *beṭījī* – the only living female religious leader of Puṣṭimārg.

Indira *beṭījī* is an extraordinary figure and her life and status as a Gosvāmī marks a significant shift in the traditional roles ascribed to women in the Gosvāmī household. As we discussed in chapter four, historically, as Brahmin women *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* observed *pardā* remaining in the women’s quarters (*zenānā*) of their homes and *havelīs* most of the time. In Indira *beṭījī*’s family, both male and female students were home schooled and no female from the Gosvāmī household attended a public educational institute until Indira *beṭījī* decided to do so in 1962 when she attended the Women’s College of Baroda (Gandhi 11-12). After living with her older brother, Śrī Mathureshji

Mahārāj, in Baroda for most of her life Indira *beṭījī* opened her Vrajdhām *havelī* on her sixtieth birthday in 1999. Today, she manages all the bureaucratic affairs associated with the temple, which includes operating a rest-house or *dharmśālā* of thirty rooms for Puṣṭimārgīs who come to visit Vrajdhām, offering vocational classes for women twice a year on *havelī* grounds, and organizing *mahilā maṇḍals* (“women’s groups”).¹⁷¹ Through the establishment of the Vallabha Memorial Trust in Ahmedabad, she oversees the publication of Puṣṭimārg texts and provides funding for building rest-houses in pilgrimage centers. Through the Ananda Mangal Trust, also in Ahmedabad, her administration engages in charitable activities such as building and subsidizing hospitals and eye clinics and providing aid during droughts and natural disasters. Finally, in Baroda, her Anugraha Trust redistributes all the funds received through donations to constructing libraries, building more rest-houses, and organizing *śivirs* or religious retreats (Gandhi 14-17).

With regards to her ritual and religious activities, Indira *beṭījī*’s actions resonate with the historical Yamuṇā *beṭījī* (1669-1730, see pages 175-176), with whom Indira *beṭījī* herself draws parallels. At her Vrajdhām *havelī* Indira *beṭījī* performs *ārti* at each of the eight *darśans* during the day and on occasion she also performs the *śṛṅgār* or the adornment of the Bālkrṣṇalālī *svarūp*. She has both male and female *mukhiyās* (“temple officiants”) who assist her during the performance of *sevā*, and they also replace her when she is not in town or is feeling ill. Although her female assistants observe menstrual restrictions while performing *havelī sevā*, since Indira *beṭījī* is clearly at a post-menopausal age this is a non-issue for her. With the permission of her grandfather, in

¹⁷¹ Personal communication, December 1st 2008.

1971 she also began conducting *kathās* or public discourses and lectures on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and is the first and only woman in the Puṣṭimārg tradition to have ever done so (11). To the disapproval of many male Gosvāmīs and even some female members of the *sampradāy*, Indira *beṭījī* is also perhaps the only contemporary and publically recognized *beṭījī* to grant *dīkṣā* or initiation to Puṣṭimārgīs. Finally, starting in July 1980, Indira *beṭījī* made her first trips to London and to the United States, and is currently the co-chair of trust *havelīs* in the UK, and across the US, such as in New York, Houston, Chicago, and San Francisco.¹⁷² Indira *beṭījī* has thus successfully contributed to the globalization of Puṣṭimārg in the twentieth century in a significant way.¹⁷³

In every respect Indira *beṭījī* is a charismatic, powerful figure of authority in contemporary Puṣṭimārg. Although a majority of male Gosvāmīs state that before marriage, as a member of the Vallabha *kul*, *beṭījīs* can participate in temple worship and even under certain circumstances give *dīkṣā*, what appears to be the most controversial aspect of Indira *beṭījī*'s actions is her practice of initiating individuals and, therefore, her role as a guru is considered problematic for many Puṣṭimārg leaders. The following description of Indira *beṭījī* offered by one of her closest disciples can provide some indication as to why male Gosvāmīs, and even their *bahūjīs*, become uncomfortable when questioned about Indira *beṭījī*. Maya Desai, a woman who moved from the United States to permanently live with Indira *beṭījī* in Baroda, says: “Yes, there are many female figures within the Mahārāj household, but Indira *beṭījī* goes out, gives lectures, travels to other countries, she does what she wants. She acts like a man; she functions and behaves

¹⁷² Personal communication, December 1st 2008.

¹⁷³ Indira *beṭījī*'s travels outside of India can be understood as part of what Karen Pechilis characterizes as the “third-wave” movement of gurus – particularly by prominent female Hindu gurus – to the United States through the 1970s and 80s (113, 2012 ;10, 2004)

like a Mahārāj.”¹⁷⁴ Indira *beṭījī* is not a female who acts under the purview of a male Mahārāj. Instead, she is a Gosvāmī who presides over her own *havelī* and she is a guru who initiates. After questioning a male Gosvāmī (who did not want his identity to be disclosed) several times about the apparent contradictions surrounding the role of other *beṭījīs* vis-à-vis the figure of Indira *beṭījī*, he said: “Look, Gosvāmīs don’t want their women, be it their *bahūjīs* or their *beṭījīs*, to go out of the *havelī*, get educated, have followers, and have power – because then they will be out of our grasp, out of our control.”¹⁷⁵ However, he did go on to acknowledge that since more women than men visit *havelīs* for *darśan*, more women participate in *bhajan maṇḍalīs*, and they are the primary performers of domestic *sevā*, it is a “good and important thing that a woman such as Indira *beṭī* has a leadership role within the community. She is opening doors for future generations, and women from the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy* need to follow her.” Indeed, there are women from Gosvāmī households following her lead who, not surprisingly, come from Indira *beṭījī*’s own extended family.

Brajlata *bahūjī* is Indira *beṭījī*’s sister-in-law, married to Indira *beṭījī*’s younger brother, Chandragopalji Mahārāj, who also lives in Baroda but maintains no *haveli* of his own. Brajlata *bahūjī* remembers some of the difficulties she had in adjusting to the Gosvāmī lifestyle after she married Chandragopal Mahārāj, including her disappointment at having to abandon her interest in the Sciences. She did her BSc in Zoology, but after marrying Chandragopal Gosvāmī she felt that she needed to shift the focus of her academic interests to a subject that would help her participate in Pustimārgī

¹⁷⁴ Personal communication, December 1st 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Personal communication, February 2nd, 2009.

religious culture. In her own words she said that she was inspired by Indira *beṭījī* and decided to obtain an MA in Sanskrit.¹⁷⁶ A few years later, she even started her PhD in Philosophy focusing on Upaniṣadic texts. However, after falling ill for an extended period of time she discontinued her PhD and has never gone back to academic study. Regarding the roles of *bahūjīs* within the tradition, Brajlata *bahūjī* idealizes the past and claims that *bahūjīs* used to organize *satsaṅg* groups for women, read and taught the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and also discussed Vallabha's Sanskrit works.

Now, Brajlata *bahūjī* admits, no female from the Gosvāmī household seems to have the capacity to teach others about Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy. “Whether a guru is a woman or man is irrelevant,” Brajlata asserts, “only that person who has the “*yogyitā*” – who is qualified, or worthy of – becoming a guru should initiate individuals.” Indira *beṭījī*, Brajlata says, is an exemplary individual and, therefore, it is fitting for her to be a guru. Not only did Indira *beṭījī* influence her decision to pursue a Masters and PhD, Brajlata admits that it is also because of Indira *beṭījī*'s progressive and at times even rebellious attitude towards male Mahārāj authority that made it possible for Brajlata to “step-outside” the Mahārāj household and offer public lectures on various texts ranging from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *vārtās*, and Vallabha's philosophical treatises (Figure 8).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Personal communication, February 2nd 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Brajlata *bahūjī* has also written several short books on the life and teachings of Vallabhācārya, including *Tasmai Śrī Guruve Namaḥ* (2007), *Jagadgurū Śrīmadvallabhācārtyajī Śrīmahāprabhujī Caritra*, *Updeśsarane Grantho* (2000), and *Śrīmad Jagadgurū Śrīmadvallabhācārtyajīkī Dṛṣṭime Daśamskandha Vicār* (2005).



Figure. 8. Brajlata *bahūjī* giving a lecture in the Vrajdhām *havelī*, Baroda.

It is clear that the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs have found multiple ways to negotiate and even appropriate religious roles and authority for themselves. As noted in chapter four, from at least the nineteenth century, *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* have participated in the tradition by producing literary works that form a prominent aspect of lived Puṣṭimārgī culture. In the contemporary context, *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* are continuing to compose devotional poetry; Indira *beṭījī*, for example, has composed hundreds of *pads* using the pen-name “Śrāvaṇī.” However, what is innovative is the ways in which contemporary *bahūjīs* and *beṭījīs* are breaching the boundaries of the Gosvāmī household and participating in Puṣṭimārg religious culture in a very public way. Brajlata *bahūjī* appropriates male Brahmanic authority by engaging in public discourses on Puṣṭimārg philosophy and by discussing Vallabha’s Sanskrit treatises. While Indira *beṭījī* has carved out a new role for women from the Mahārāj household: that of a religious leader and of a guru who initiates.

In the time I spent with Indira *beṭījī*, it became clear to me that her gender as a woman has radically altered the nature of guru-disciple relationship in Puṣṭimārg. Both female devotees who have received initiation from Indira *beṭījī* as well as those who have not appreciate having a guru/Gosvāmī with whom they can share both emotional and physical proximity. As one female follower said: “I could not imagine being this close to a male Gosvāmī; with Indira *beṭījī* we can stay up till two in the morning, singing, laughing, joking together.”¹⁷⁸ Women who visit Indira *beṭījī* not only come for *darśan* but many stay and speak to her about their personal problems, such as any issues they may be having with their families as well as difficulties in finding a suitable husband, finding a good job, and so on. In Indira *beṭījī*’s own words: “my female devotees do everything with me, they sleep near me, they eat with me...A man can never have this relationship with me.”¹⁷⁹

The figure of Indira *beṭījī* also complicates our understanding of how popular female gurus are approached by their followers and how they demonstrate and legitimize their charismatic status as religious leaders. Unlike other well-known female gurus, such as the late Anandamayi Mā (1896-1982) or the living Mata Amritanandamayi (b. 1953), for example, Indira *beṭījī* is part of an orthodox sectarian tradition or *sampradāy*. She can also be differentiated from figures like the historical Sitā Devī (fl. sixteenth century) – the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇav figure who assumed a leadership position after her husband, Advaita Ācārya, passed away – and Svāmī Chidvilasananda, popularly known as Gurumayi (b.1955), of the Siddha Yoga movement by not being understood as an embodiment of a

¹⁷⁸ Personal communication, December 3rd 2008.

¹⁷⁹ Personal communication, February 10th, 2009.

goddess or as a channel for *śakti* (“divine feminine energy”). She serves as a counterpoint to the claims made by Karen Pechilis regarding female gurus: “the more relevant concept for understanding female gurus is Shakti...Female Hindu gurus are [thus] distinguished from female Hindu saints through the distinction between Shakti and bhakti” (8-9, 2004). Indira *beṭījī* is part of a *bhakti* tradition, is not perceived as a goddess nor as a medium for bestowing/invoking *śakti*, and yet initiates disciples and serves as a guru figure to thousands of practitioners. Furthermore, Indira *beṭījī* does not see herself as a *saṁnyāsīnī* or an ascetic – even though she never married.¹⁸⁰ By never marrying Indira *beṭījī* maintains her position as a member of the Vallabha *kul* or lineage and she lives in her own *havelī*/home, surrounded by an entourage of assistants and followers. This allows her to occupy a position of liminality as a “householder-ascetic,” which is in keeping with Vallabha’s stance against renunciation, while her sexuality is deflected by the honorific title of *Beṭījī* or “respected daughter” (instead of “Mā” or “mother” as other female gurus are often referred to).

When Indira *beṭījī* was questioned by the author of her biography as to how, as a woman, she is able to bestow initiation and give *kathās* on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, she responded by saying that she does not see her identity as fixed by her female gender (Gandhi 37-38). Meanwhile she acknowledges how Vallabha himself regarded the *gopīs* as his own gurus, therefore, Indira *beṭījī* asks: why cannot women be gurus today? As a descendent of Vallabha and as a Gosvāmī figure, Indira *beṭījī* admits that her followers perceive of her as a form, or living representative, of Vallabha. She, however, does not

¹⁸⁰ Indira *beṭījī* is normally seen wearing a white or off-white *sārī*, a color traditionally associated with asceticism /widowhood. When I asked her about this, she responded by saying she wears white because she likes the color, and as she pointed out “look, it’s not all white! My *sārī* today has a green border” (Personal communication, February 10th 2009).

see herself in that image (38). In her Vrajdhām *havelī*, life-sized statues of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha are placed in the same room where she greets her followers, and whenever she delivers a *kathā* on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Indira *beṭījī* places the image of Vallabha by her side (Figure 9). Indira *beṭījī* simultaneously deflects her authority to Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha and draws legitimacy for her status and charismatic role as the only living female Gosvāmī of Puṣṭimārg by appealing to this inherited authority.



Figure 8. Indira *beṭījī* giving a *Bhāgavata kathā* in Gandhinagar. In this image, Indira *beṭījī* is on the right and the larger-than-life sized statue of Vallaba is on the left.

As the first project to examine the intersections between class formation, women’s religious activities, and domestic *sevā* in Puṣṭimārg, my work offers a counterpoint to current academic literature on Puṣṭimārg, which have portrayed the tradition as wholly temple-based. By grounding women’s domestic religious practices in a discussion on elite Puṣṭimārgī sectarian identity production and colonial modernity, this dissertation

also complements and nuances the work of scholars who have discussed the roles and activities of women in Puṣṭimārg. In contemporary Gujarat, by organizing events such as monthly Vaiṣṇav kitty parties, arranging for private *kīrtan* lessons, and functioning as the primary consumers and displayers of religious commodities in the home, elite Puṣṭimārgī women are engaged in innovative, class-based mechanisms of sectarian identity formation. Their religious activities are also continuing to perpetuate Puṣṭimārg as a lived tradition. Finally, the contemporary figures of Indira *beṭījī* and Brajlata *bahūjī* briefly discussed above indicate the radical transformations taking place in the Gosvāmī household vis-à-vis the traditional roles of women from these families.

Indira *beṭījī* is today at the center of a global community of Puṣṭimārgī followers. In my work with her at her Vrajdhām *havelī* in Baroda, I met many “NRI” (Non Resident Indian) Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs who accept Indira *beṭījī* as their guru. These individuals, who live in the UK, the United States, and Canada frequently visit the Vrajdhām *havelī* and sometimes stay there for weeks and months at a time. Indira *beṭījī* has established a large network of *havelīs* in many cities around the world, and the number of diasporic *havelīs* and their surrounding Puṣṭimārg communities continue to grow. Her status and activities as a Gosvāmī open up possibilities for future research on Puṣṭimārg in transnational contexts and address the complex issues that arise in diasporic contexts around the maintenance of sectarian (*sampradāyic*) identity. A focus on Indira *beṭījī* would also complement this dissertation; given our discussion on reform and women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg it is remarkable that today Indira *beṭījī*, a woman from the Gosvāmī household, is, in many ways, the face Puṣṭimārg’s globalized community.

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